

A Different Take

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A Different Take

by [CyberWolfWrites](#)

Summary

Peter Parker never met Tony Stark. He never went to Germany and fought the Avengers, and he sure as hell didn't get that cool suit. What he did get, however, was a dead Aunt and Uncle and a traumatic event that he's calling the Homecoming Incident. Now nearing sixteen years old, Peter's been in foster care for about two years with a man that reminds him too much of an old babysitter.

When Peter and the rest of his Academic Decathlon go to the now renamed Stark Tower for a field trip, Peter gets his chance to show off what he knows. After gaining the attention of his hero and icon, Peter struggles to keep up with his now very very part-time job as Spider-Man, his horrible home-life with his foster father, and keeping it all from his idol who knows a little about the abuse he's receiving at home.

Notes

I hope you like what I've written! Decided to mash up a shit ton of fics and ideas and tropes into one fanfic.

- Inspired by [What's Wrong with the System?](#) by [hold_our_destiny](#)
- Inspired by [A long way to go](#) by [usingmymadeupname](#)

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

3/6/2021: Please be aware that for the next or so week that I'll be doing a minor edit/rewrite for this fic (meaning it won't be all at once, so you'll have to deal with chapters that are edited and those that are not). Unlike "A Family's Bond," I won't be completely rewriting this whole thing (yet), but I'm just clearing up a few things because I just realized that it's like *suuuuuuper* annoying to read, especially Peter's stuttering.

I'll mainly be removing the double spaces, making it past tense, and as I said, I will be removing a lot of the stuttering so that it's more of a coherent read. I might rewrite a scene here or there (such as the ending of this chapter, which means that it won't really match the next chapter) so please tell me if things don't match up or if it's too annoying and you want me to just rewrite the rest of the chapter.

Cheers and roars filled the air as the Academic Decathlon team for Midtown School of Science and Technology rushed onto the stage, all yelling in excitement and happiness. Many people reached out and clapped Peter on the back and shoulder, somehow not noticing the way he flinched at every touch. It was the semi-finals for state regionals and Peter had just answered the winning question, effectively sending them straight to the state regionals. Peter's senses were running high and getting somewhat overwhelmed, but even that can't stop his ecstatic grin as he hugged Ned.

"Okay, everyone, quiet down!" the announcer for the competition yelled. It took a few moments for the last of the cheers to quiet down and the announcer turned in the direction of Midtown's Academic Decathlon. The announcer had a huge grin and everyone looked at him in curiosity. "It is my pleasure to announce that the winning team, Midtown School of Science and Technology, has been awarded a tour of Stark Industries!"

There was a shocked silence before an even louder chorus of yells and screams filled the air.

"Oh my God, dude! We're going to Stark Industries!" Ned yelled out in excitement, grabbing Peter's shoulders and shaking him in excitement. Peter doesn't mind, he's too caught up in the fact that they're going to be getting a tour of *Stark Industries*. It had been his dream to get to work at SI for years, and while he wasn't there yet, he was actually going to be able to tour its headquarters! That dream was right up there next to meeting Tony Stark, his idol, himself.

"Holy shit! I can't believe it!" said Peter excitedly when the crowd began to disperse, everyone beginning to go home. "Stark Industries, Ned. We get to go to *Stark Industries*!" Suddenly, as a thought crossed his mind, Peter's face fell. He'd forgotten about one minor detail.

"Oh, crap, dude, do you think your foster dad's gonna let you go?" Ned asked him with furrowed brows. Peter shrugged, his elation turning into hesitance and even fear. He really hoped that Dr Malek, his foster father, would let him go on the field trip. After his grades had fallen due to being Spider-Man (and not to mention the grief of losing his last family member), the man had forced him to quit almost all of his after-school activities. He used to be in band and the robotics and chemistry clubs, but he'd been forced to quit them. Dr Malek had wanted him to quit Decathlon, too, and the only reason he'd been allowed to continue it was because Peter had quite literally had

to get down on his knees and beg. The man had also banned him from going to Ned's, hanging out with the team sometimes after school, and participating in any robotics and engineering competitions the school promoted.

Peter was glad that he was allowed to participate in Academic Decathlon because it provided him with an escape. An escape from the grief that still plagued him and an escape from his home life. Just the thought of it had his skin crawling and he swiftly pushed those thoughts away.

"I hope so," Peter said, before he muttered under his breath, "I mean, why wouldn't he let me go? He's the one who's always complaining about me not doing things to better my position in the world or something." Peter ignored Ned's concerned expression and hoped that he hadn't heard much of what he's muttered. He knew that Ned suspected that something was going on at "home" but he really didn't want his best friend to find out.

He'd probably think he was disgusting or something and would leave him just like everyone else did.

Pulling out his phone and checking the time, Peter sucked in a panicked breath, looking up at Ned. "Crap, I gotta go," he said hurriedly, shoving his stuff into his backpack and heading out of the theatre where the competition took place. "Dr Malek wants me home by six-thirty, and if I'm not there on time, I'll get grounded again. See you next week!"

All Ned could do was nod before Peter grabbed his permission slip for the field trip and shot out of the school building like a rocket. It was about a quarter after six and thankfully Dr Malek lived super close to the school. Otherwise, Peter would have to worry about spending money on the metro. Still, in order to get back to the apartment on time, he had sprint down the sidewalks and he nearly bowled over a lady just as he managed to make it to the apartment building. He's nearly panting by the time he's walking in the apartment door (and he refused to think about how he could've made that run if he had still been living with May) and he cringed when he checked his phone and noticed that he's just barely made it on time.

"Cutting it a little close, aren't you, boy?"

Peter barely managed to hide his flinch at Dr Malek's harsh remark and he swallowed, ignoring the man's gaze.

Dr Malek was a handsome man in his late thirties. He worked at a small pharmaceutical company and often worked overtime, though Peter didn't know why since pharmacists got paid a lot and the man was getting monthly stipends to foster him. He was also very cold and very strict and didn't like children, which confused Peter. Why would he become a foster parent if he didn't like children?

Peter stared at the floor, tightening his grip on his backpack nervously. "Sorry, sir," he murmured, making sure his voice is clear. His cheek itched where the man hit him the last time he mumbled. Dr Malek didn't like asking him to repeat himself.

Dr Malek nodded approvingly—or in acceptance, either one—and Peter watched him from beneath his lashes. The man was seated at the kitchen table eating dinner and he couldn't help the way his stomach clenched in hunger. All he'd eaten for the past week was lunch at school and that was not nearly enough to sate his advanced metabolism.

"No worries," the man said as he leant back in his chair, surprising Peter enough that his head snapped upward. "So, how was it?"

The boy blinked at the man for a few moments before cautiously replying, "We won. I answered the winning question and it was announced that we're going on a field trip to Stark Industries." His permission slip crinkled in his hands and he tacked on, "That is if you allow me to go, sir." He held up the permission slip and Dr Malek waved him forward. Peter rushed forward, nearly stumbling over his own feet, and he placed the slightly wrinkled paper in the man's hand. He watched as the man read it.

"Sure, why not?" Dr Malek shrugged, surprising Peter again. "You did win the competition, after all, and you've been good about your grades recently. Your social worker hasn't called, either, so you must be doing something right for once. And maybe you can see about getting a job or an internship. Not that I'd expect them to pick a high school student over the tons of college students applying."

Peter looked down at the backhanded comment, though he hadn't expected otherwise. Along with being cold and strict, the man wasn't what you would call kind. Oh, he could certainly be charming—he had this slight smirk, and he could be very engaging, but there was this look in his eyes that had Peter's skin crawling at times—but that was usually when he was speaking to someone that was decidedly Not Peter.

"Thank you, sir," Peter still thanked the man, handing the man a pen from his picket. He couldn't help but smile, despite how he felt about the man, because he was actually being allowed to go to Stark Industries. "Really, Dr Malek, I'm really grateful. Thank you."

The man just nodded.

"Go shower and get yourself something to eat," Dr Malek ordered. "I can hear your stomach begging for food all the way over here." Peter felt his ears burn in embarrassment. "Make sure to do your homework before you sleep, as well. I don't want another call from your school about your missing assignments."

"Yes, sir," Peter muttered before rushing to his room and locking the door, thankful that his bedroom had a bathroom attached. He locked the bathroom doors, as well. Just in case.

A week later and the school bus holding the Academic Decathlon team was pulling up to the Tower. Everyone peered at the large, sleek building through their windows, which was now once again branded as Stark Tower (it had changed after the "Avengers's civil war" as the media called it). Peter had heard that Mr Stark had actually been planning on selling the tower and moving to some new Avengers facility before Peter had kinda-accidentally crashed the plane that Mr Toomes had gone after. Peter was still pretty sure that Mr Stark had no idea who he was—Spider-Man, that was—other than the fact that he had simultaneously crashed his no-doubt million-dollar private plane and saved his items from being converted into dangerous weapons and-or being sold on the black market.

"Okay, everyone, listen up!" Mr Harrington called out, standing at the front of the bus as it pulled up beside the tower. "Ms Potts has so graciously gifted us the chance to tour Stark Industries for our win at the semi-finals, thanks again Peter for knowing that vulcanizing is the process of adding sulfur to natural rubber in order to create a much harder and more durable product."

Peter's face burned and he slid down in his seat as everyone, save for Flash, clapped. After a few moments, everyone became silent and Mr Harrington continued his speech. "There are going to be a few ground rules, however," he said, causing half of the bus to groan out in annoyance. "No wandering off, no bothering faculty, and especially no trying to go where you're not supposed to. If

Stark Industries decides that you all can't behave, no one else will get the opportunity to come here ever again.

"Now, I've been told that you all will get a chance to visit some of the labs in the R&D department of the Tower." Everyone immediately began to chatter in excitement. Peter and Ned immediately shared excited glances, both wondering about what sorts of things SI was working on and what types of things they'd be able to see. "Quiet down everyone!" Mr Harrington practically shouted, almost immediately quieting the bus again. "Now, as I said, you'll all get a chance to explore the labs. You will wear any and all protective gear required and you will not touch anything unless you're told you can."

Mr Harrington stared them all down, his eyes narrowing on Flash, Peter, and Ned. The glare was somewhat unnerving since the man was usually so carefree and lax, but at least it tells everyone on the bus how serious this was. If they touch anything and manage to break it, not only would they and the school get in trouble, but it was most likely that no one else would ever get a tour of Stark Industries again. And Peter personally didn't want to be at fault for that so he will be on his best behaviour. Especially when the thought of what Dr Malek might do to him if he managed to get in trouble again went through his mind. He *definitely* didn't want to get "disciplined" again.

He refocused his thoughts as Mr Harrington began to speak again. "You will all listen to any and all persons that are giving us the tour. If any of you so much as go against anything they say, you will be spending the rest of the day handcuffed to me so I can personally keep an eye on you and you will not be permitted to go on any future Academic Decathlon field trips. Do you all understand?" Everyone nodded at the threat, some of them even going as far as to say "yes sir" and the like.

"Good," Mr Harrington said, nodding to himself before checking his watch. "Now, we're right on time. Let's go, everyone."

"Do you think we're going to see Iron Man?" Ned squealed as everyone began to speak again. Peter flinched slightly at the high-pitched noise so close to his ear. "Wouldn't that be so cool?"

"It *would* be pretty cool if we got to see Mr Stark!" he admitted. "I hear that he's been working on some new clean energy things for SI and I'm really curious about them. Wouldn't it be cool if we got a sneak peek at some of their newer tech?"

They all filed out of the bus, Mr Harrington leading the way into the somewhat crowded lobby. The receptionist looked up as Mr Harrington stopped in front of her.

"Excuse me, we're from Midtown School of Science and Technology. We have a tour today?" The woman hummed with a nod, typing something on her computer.

"The Academic Decathlon team?" she questioned, causing Mr Harrington to nod and smile at her. "Yes, you all have a tour scheduled from eight-thirty until two. An intern, Amy, will be your tour guide today." The receptionist pointed over to a blonde girl in her early twenties. "She has your ID lanyards so head over to her." Mr Harrington thanked her and led everyone over to Amy.

"Hello, Midtown Tech!" the blonde said with a practised smile, making Peter think that she'd was used to doing this type of thing. "Everyone has a guest ID printed for them. These'll let you go anywhere in the lobby and has restricted access for the lower labs on floors two to fifteen. You also have access to floor fifty-five which is the cafeteria and recreational floor. These lanyards have your picture, name, and tell us whether or not you're an employee, intern, or guest.

"Do not lose them and do not cover them. If they are not seen, then security may think you're up to

something and you'll be forced to either go home or spend the whole day locked in one of the unused meeting rooms until your tour is done. You'll have to scan them before entering any and all rooms. If you try to go anywhere that you are not authorized to go to, the company's AI, Jocasta, will stop you and report you to Tony Stark's personal AI, Friday, who will then inform either Mr Stark himself or his head of security, Mr Hogan. Everyone understand?" Everyone nodded. "Good! Now, Sally Avril...?"

Amy called everyone's names and passed them their IDs. Peter threw the lanyard over his head and practically cradled his badge. It has his school picture with his name (*Parker, Peter B.*) under it, with *Guest* written under that. It was probably one of the coolest things he'd ever gotten and he hoped that they would be able to keep them. He also wondered what it would be like if he had an employee badge like Amy's and Dr Malek's words from a week ago passed through his mind, making his smile falter slightly. Before Ned could notice, he pasted another one on his face. He wasn't sure it was convincing, but as nobody looked at him oddly, he guessed it was good enough.

The man was right, a persistent voice in his mind whispered. He'd never get approached for an internship. He was truly an orphan now and a scholarship was the only thing giving him a chance in the world. Stark Industries would never approach a broke orphan for an internship. Peter might as well throw away his hopes of being an employee here away. He sighed at the thoughts and tried to push them away, ignoring Ned and MJ's glances. MJ had become his kinda-sorta friend after becoming the Captain of the Decathlon team, but they never really got to hang out much because he wasn't allowed to go anywhere after school.

He followed the rest of the group as they followed Amy and he balked slightly as they were led into an elevator. He'd had problems with small spaces ever since the incident with the warehouse, and as he was already feeling anxious today, he wasn't sure how he was going to handle being in a small space with a bunch of other people. He made sure that he was standing next to Ned, who pressed his arm against Peter, knowing that he needed someone to ground him. Ned didn't hear the full story, but he knew enough to know that Peter was no longer comfortable with small places.

By the time the elevator reached whatever floor they were going to, Peter's hands had started shaking and his breathing was somewhat shallow. He was one of the first people out of the elevator and he focused on Amy in an attempt to push away the feeling of the walls closing in on him. Ned helpfully continued to stand close enough that they were touching, which steadily had him calming down.

Amy walked them through what looked to be a history museum for Stark Industries. There was even a section holding Avengers things even though they were a company separate from SI. There was a full wall of Tony Stark's first few iron man armours which were *fascinating*, some prototype Captain America shields that looked old enough to be from Captain America's original generation, Widow's bites, arrows, and even an old pair of Falcon's wings. Peter and Ned hung around the Iron Man suits while MJ examined something about when SI first started out. They idly discussed how Mr Stark got the arc reactor to work with the armour and how the armour most likely worked, something that was a common pastime amongst them.

Peter was mostly the one talking the science, though, while Ned was ranting about how awesome it was to stand in front of Iron Man's armour. Ned had always idolized the hero rather than the man, though Peter couldn't deny that he'd done his fair share of that. It was just that he'd been a fan of Tony Stark before he even became Iron Man. He'd watched the news when the man was declared missing and he'd watched the news when the man shut down the weapons manufacturing division of SI.

After a few minutes, Peter walked away from the more modern section of the mini-museum to

check out the history of the company.

"Stark Industries was founded by Howard Stark in 1940 in an attempt to help out with the war effort. Stark Industries was a great pioneer in different types of technology and constantly helping the United States Armed Forces by manufacturing and innovating weapons and helping the government to create the Super Soldier Serum," Peter read to himself. "SI continued to manufacture weapons for the United States Armed Forces until Tony Stark shut down the weapons manufacturing division in 2008. Stark Industries is now involved in inventing and creating affordable clean energy projects, medical equipment, devices such as cell phones, laptops, and tablets, as well as vehicles and prostheses."

"Okay, everyone!" Amy called out after a few more minutes, gaining the attention of all the students. "We're heading up to the lower labs. We'll visit them for a little bit before lunch, and then you guys have a little surprise!"

Whispers permeated the air, most people wondering about what the "secret" was and they were led to the elevator again. Peter reluctantly followed his classmates into the elevator and he clenched his fists, his nails biting into his palms slightly and the pain distracting him when the elevator didn't move even after Amy pressed the button for the next floor.

"I am not authorized to take guests up to that level," a clear female voice said, causing everyone to jump and look around them wildly. Amy's brows pulled together in a confused frown.

"I thought that the tour was allowed to access the lower labs?" she said in confusion as she looked at the ceiling, probably towards the camera or speakers that the voice—which Peter realized must be the AI, "Jocasta"—was using.

"Would you like me to inform Ms Potts of the problem?" Jocasta asked.

"Yes," Amy stated firmly and they were left to wait. Peter breathed to himself, focusing on the mutters going around. Some were talking about what they saw in the museum or were scrolling through social media on their phones, but most were talking about the voice they heard. It was about thirty seconds later when Jocasta spoke again. *"Ms Potts has given permission for the tour to access the lower labs."*

The elevator moved upward smoothly and the doors opened seconds later.

Peter rushed out of the elevator and stuffed his shaking hands in the pockets of his jacket, trying to ignore the urge to gasp for air as if he'd run a marathon. Ned gazed at him in concern and MJ was looking at him curiously, but Peter ignored their gazes in embarrassment. He couldn't even stand in a room with a bunch of other people without freaking out. It was pathetic.

Amy spent the next few hours leading them through the labs and they occasionally got back into the elevator to check out some of the other projects that SI was currently working on that they had clearance to look at. The Decathlon team had a lot of questions, leading to a few long discussions, and some of the people in charge of the projects gave some presentations on the few working prototypes they had. They were then moved onto the lower labs that had a mix of college interns and newer employees, where they were allowed to walk around to look at the projects they were working on and to ask questions.

Peter watched from a distance as a college student, probably an intern, scowled at an arm prosthesis. It looked super cool, kinda like the arm the Winter Soldier had that Peter had seen from the videos, and he couldn't help but walk forward for a closer look. The intern swore under his breath as his fingers slipped, making a wire fall into a mass of other wires.

Before he could stop himself, Peter was talking, "Do you need any help? It looks like you're having trouble—You know what? Nevermind, I'll just leave you alone now..."

As Peter turned around, hunched in himself, the intern called out, "Wait!" Peter froze and looked back at the intern, who was looking at Peter with something like hope in his eyes. "How good are you with wires?" Peter's eyebrows furrowed and he tilted his head to the side.

"I don't know? I mean, I'm pretty good with soldering them and connecting them and stuff? I'm used to using pliers or tweezers..." Peter trailed off with a shrug, fiddling with his sweater sleeves self-consciously.

"Good!" the intern said. "I'm having some trouble attaching a loose wire to a circuit. You wanna see if you can attach it? I don't think anyone would mind you helping out. It's the smaller dark blue one, by the way." Peter hesitantly stepped up to the arm and stared into the section of the arm through a magnifying glass. He picked up a pair of rubber-tipped tweezers and found himself calming down as he faced something he was familiar with.

"It's the open module on the left, right?" he asked the intern, spotting a connector with a dark blue rim that had no wire in it. From the corner of his eyes, Peter could see the guy nod, and so he gently moved around some of the wires in search of the unconnected blue wire. It didn't take long to find it, though it was in a precarious spot. He squinted his eyes in concentration and bit his lip as he grabbed the tip of the wire. It snagged just as he put it in the connector, which was probably why it got loose in the first place. He took a few seconds to untangle it before he connected it again, and juggling the tweezers in his hands, he soldered the wire in place. After a few seconds to wait for it to cool, Peter tugged on the wire. It stayed attached and he grinned at his success, leaning back and letting out a big sigh. Peter didn't think he breathed through that whole thing!

"The wire got tangled up, which is probably why it kept getting loose," Peter told the intern, who had leant forward to make sure he didn't mess anything up. "I untangled it for you and soldered it before it could slip out again."

"Hey, man, thanks so much!" the intern said with a relieved sigh, grinning up at Peter. "You have no idea how long I've been trying to get that wire to stick. My hand kept shaking and I kept dropping the wire and this prototype's due by the end of the day. You really saved my ass!"

"No problem!" Peter said with a somewhat shy grin, his ears burning slightly at the praise. They spoke for a few more minutes about the prosthetic—apparently, SI tested their college interns by giving them a project to complete in a limited time frame—before Peter moved on to look at some other projects. It wasn't long until Peter was starting to feel hungry—well, hungrier—and Amy called them back over to the elevator.

"All right, guys, it's time for lunch," she said, pressing the button for the cafeteria. The doors slid open to reveal a long hallway with doors and Amy led them a few doors down to a sparsely inhabited room. It was about the size of the cafeteria back at the school and there was a small kitchen off to the side with a few workers who were set up similarly to a lunch assembly line.

Instead of following the rest of his peers to the line where they could buy lunch, Peter shuffled out of the cafeteria and down the hall. He figured that this floor was designed for people to take their breaks since he had spotted a few rooms filled with chairs and tables. He was headed to one room in particular that he had spotted when they headed down the hall. It was right next to the elevator and had a vending machine in it.

Peter only had a five-dollar bill that he found on the side of the street this morning so he figured instead of embarrassing himself and buying the cheapest meal offered at the cafeteria—which he

probably couldn't afford—he would just buy some snacks from the vending machine.

The vending machine was one of those large ones where you had to punch in individual numbers to get what you wanted. It had multiple options for snacks and candy, and some drinks, but nothing that was considered to be actual food. Peter supposed that this was due to the fact that there was a cafeteria right down the hall. He eyed the options and saw that he had enough money for a bottle of Gatorade and a bag of chips. He put the five-dollar bill in, punched in the number for the Gatorade, and then punched the number in for the chips.

Corkscrew thing turning, the chips went to drop, only to get stuck on the bag of Cheetos below it. Peter glared at the machine and debated whether or not it was worth it to try and shake it. Was there some sort of alarm system in place that would inform anyone that he was trying to break into the machine to get a bag of chips? Staring at the Gatorade in his hand and then mournfully back at his chips, Peter decided it was not worth it. His shoulders slumped and his stomach growled and just as he started to turn to leave, someone said—

“You’re a little young to work here, aren't you, kid?”

Peter yelped and spun around. He hadn't heard anyone come up behind him, probably because he was too distracted by the fact that he only had a bottle of Gatorade to show for his lunch. His eyes widened when he spotted who spoke to him.

“M-Mr Stark,” he said faintly. The man, dressed in a pair of jeans and an old t-shirt smudged with motor oil, smirked at him.

“Yeah, hi,” he said, raising a brow at Peter. “You’re obviously too young to work here. What are you, an intern? I didn't think interns came to this floor at this time. Or were twelve-years-old for that matter.”

“Oh, uh, my school's on a field trip. We're getting lunch and I was just...” Peter's voice faltered and he gestured nervously to the vending machine, ignoring the twelve-year-old comment.

“Not a fan of cafeteria food, kid?” Mr Stark asked, pushing off the table he was leaning against and heading to the vending machine. “I gotta say, I'm a little offended. My cafeterias have the *best* food. I'm pretty sure my employees prefer to come here for dates instead of going out. Well, to each their own, I guess.” He shrugged as if it didn't bother him. Maybe it didn't.

Peter rubbed the back of his neck, his ears flaming red. He didn't want to tell Mr Stark, a billionaire, that he didn't have enough money to afford the cafeteria food, no matter how good it smelled.

“Then why aren't *you* getting food in the cafeteria?” Peter found himself blurting out. His eyes widened and he slapped a hand to his mouth in mortification. He couldn't believe that he just said that, and to the owner of the building he was currently in at that! What if he kicked him out? Flash would have a field day!

But instead of getting angry or kicking him out, Mr Stark merely chuckled and said, “Touché. My lab ran out of chips and I got the munchies, so I headed down here.” He looked over at the vending machine. “So, what's the issue here? Chips got stuck?”

“Y-Yeah,” stuttered Peter quietly, his face red.

Mr Stark hummed and walked up to the machine. He rocked it a few times—apparently, there was no alarm on it, then—but the bag of Doritos still didn't fall. “Let's try this...” the man muttered to

himself as Peter watched on curiously. Mr Stark reached into his pocket and pulled a ten-dollar bill out of his wallet. He shoved it into the machine and punched in the number for the Cheetos that his chips were caught on, and they watched as the chip bag fell, taking Peter's Doritos with it into the bottom of the machine for retrieval.

"Aha!" said Mr Stark victoriously, bending down and grabbing the bags. "There you go, kid."

"Thanks!" Peter said with a sheepish grin, grabbing the Doritos from Mr Stark. Mr Stark then tossed him the bag of Cheetos, which Peter caught out of reflex. He looked at them in confusion.

"Keep them," Mr Stark said with a shrug, noticing his confusion.

Peter's eyes widened. "Oh, no, Mr Stark, I couldn't—!" He tried to hand the bag of Cheetos back to Mr Stark but the man merely rolled his eyes and stepped away with his hands raised.

"I don't like being handed things," he said, "and I don't like Cheetos. Too much powdered cheese." He made a face at the thought.

"B-But—!"

Mr Stark rolled his eyes. "Listen, kid, just keep the Cheetos," he said, turning back towards the vending machine. He selected a bag of sun chips—Garden Salsa—and a bottle of water. Peter floundered awkwardly from where he stood next to the machine, wondering if he should place the Cheetos down for someone else to grab or if he should just leave before this got any more awkward. When Mr Stark turned from grabbing his snacks, he didn't look surprised that Peter hadn't left.

"Kid," he sighed. "*Please* just take the Cheetos."

Peter's mouth worked open and closed and another more serious and pointed look from Mr Stark had his jaw clicking just. "I—okay, Mr Stark."

"See, that wasn't too hard!" the man said before muttering in a voice that Peter was pretty sure he wasn't supposed to hear, "Aren't teenagers supposed to jump at the thought of someone buying them food?"

"Sorry," Peter mumbled.

"Just—skedaddle, kid, before your friends get worried about you or something," he said, ushering him out of the small room.

"Yes, sir." Peter made it a few feet down the hall before Mr Stark's voice stopped him.

"Oh, and kid? Do me a favour and don't go wandering around on your own. My Head of Security's a real stickler for rules and he would probably make you sit in a conference room until the end of your tour if he found you without the rest of your tour. Badge or not, make sure you stay with your tour guide. They've got more clearance than you."

Peter nodded sheepishly, though he was oddly touched by the man's concern, which was odd as he'd only just met the man.

"Yes, Mr Stark," he said. He waited another moment to make sure Mr Stark didn't want to say anything else but the man just shooed him away. "Going, I'm going," he muttered, though it was loud enough for the man to say. There was a slight chuckle, and then the elevators closed, and Peter was left in the hall with two bags of chips and a hysterical, surreal feeling bubbling in his

chest.

Did that just happen?

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

3/14/21: Chapter two has been officially rewritten! (I've decided to just rewrite this rather than edit since there are a few scenes that I don't like and I wanted to add some other things in. I'll eventually go back to fix the first chapter.)

This took a lot longer than I was originally planning since I'm also working on the rewrite for "A Family's Bond" (the rewrite is titled *a family's bond (the actual freaking rewrite)* for those who are curious), but I'm happy that I've finally gotten it out! The chapter is a bit on the short side but I'm overall happy with it.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tony resisted the urge to let out an annoyed groan as Pepper dragged him off to the side.

"Tony, you need to start paying attention in these meetings!" she hissed at him. "You *know* how important they are and you're deliberately making my job more difficult. You need to start paying attention and actually doing your job. The board's not happy with you because of what happened a few months ago—" Tony winced slightly at the mention of what the media has been calling the "Avengers's civil war." "—and you falling asleep and snoring in the middle of a presentation of our losses is *not helping!*"

"I don't snore!" Tony protested. Pepper gave him a withering glare and Tony sighed. "Pep, I'm *bored* in there. You want me to do my job? Then let me go to the lab! I can get so much done in there and you know it."

"All you do is sit in the lab!" Pepper said. "You've barely done any paperwork for *weeks*, Tony, and I'm getting tired of picking up your slack." Pepper stopped and sighed before continuing in a softer voice. "Tony, I *know* that you're dealing with a lot right now since—since *they* left, but you *need* to focus on your job. The company's losing money because you're slacking off. And I'm worried about you. Friday says that you haven't slept in two days and I know that's how you cope, but you can't just hole up in the lab all day without eating or sleeping."

"I eat," Tony said indignantly.

Pepper gave him a deadpan expression. "Coffee doesn't count as food, Tony."

Tony scoffed. Coffee was food, wasn't it? It provided energy, at least, and you need energy to function. That was, like, basic science.

"Now, since I've cut the meeting short, you'll be accompanying me to my next meeting to discuss ____"

"Nope!" Tony cut her off, beginning to walk to the nearest elevator. "I could barely concentrate on this meeting, what makes you think that I can concentrate on another one? As you said, I haven't slept in two days—and Friday, you're a big fat liar, you said you wouldn't tell Pepper anything—and none of the meetings are stimulating at all, I'll just end up falling asleep again! Do you want to embarrass the company *more* by having me fall asleep in the middle of the meeting and start

snoring? Just let me go back down to the lab, I'll get so much more work done, and you know that."

Pepper's expression twisted in her frustration. "Tony—" she began to growl before Jocasta, the AI that helped run the company, cut her off.

"I apologize, Ms Potts, but Amy Donohue is requesting permission for her tour group to enter the lower intern labs."

"Let them in, Jocasta," Pepper told the AI before turning back to Tony, who had snuck another few inches towards the elevator. "You are *not* spending all day in the lab today, or so help me God, I will get Friday to lock you out. I know she agrees with me on your poor habits."

Tony scoffed and muttered something about "backstabbing AIs" before turning his thoughts to what Jocasta had just asked Pepper.

"What tour group?" he asked. "I didn't know that we offered tours."

"Tony, we've been doing tours since September, where have you been? And it's for a STEM high school. Their Academic Decathlon team just won the semi-finals for state regionals. I thought that it would be good publicity for the company. All they'll be doing is looking around some of the intern labs," Pepper informed him despite being irritated with him. "They're going to have a little competition after lunch for a chance to win an internship."

"Woah, wait—Why wasn't I informed of this and when did we start offering internships to beanie babies?"

Pepper looked as if she was going to strangle Tony or shout at him at the very least, but instead, she just smiled sweetly. "You would have known about both the tour and the internship *if you had done any of your paperwork in the past month.* "

Tony winced. Okay, so maybe he *should* get around to doing some actual work. If he didn't, who knows what type of things Pepper would sign off on and consequently make him do?

"Now," Pepper said, glancing down at her StarkPad, "we're going to be late for that meeting..."

"If I promise to get some actual work done by the end of the week, will you lighten up about the meetings?" Tony practically begged Pepper. He was exhausted, and while he was starting to feel guilty about leaving Pepper with the brunt of the work, he *really* didn't want to go to another meeting. Like Pepper had said, he hadn't been to sleep in two days, and while he would love to just crash somewhere—his big and extremely comfortable bed in the penthouse, in particular—he knew that he should at least try to get some actual work done.

Pepper's lips thinned and she stopped and looked at him. *Really* looked at him. She took in his slightly rumpled clothes, his messily combed hair, and the dark bruises that he had no doubt were beneath his eyes. His usually immaculate but now sloppy appearance paired with his clear exhaustion and his pleading expression made her pause.

"Fine," she said with a sigh. "That arm prosthesis you've been putting off needs to be completed, you need to evaluate some of the college interns' late winter projects, and while you need to get caught up on some of your paperwork, I'd rather you be coherent for that so you can put it off for today."

"Great!" Tony said, stepping another few inches towards the elevators. "Anything else?"

“Actually, there is. You know the tour group from the high school that I mentioned a few minutes ago?”

“The one you’re testing for an internship that I didn’t agree to?” Tony said dryly.

Pepper rolled her eyes. “Yes. I want you to review the footage of them working. There are a bunch of uncompleted, scrapped projects that they’ll be working on and trying to fix or improve for a chance to get an internship. While I’m having some of the heads in R&D and the intern labs grading their projects, I’d like your input since you’ll be working with one of them.”

Tony must be delirious from sleep deprivation because he was pretty sure he just heard Pepper say that he’d be *working* with an intern. And not even a college-educated one, at that! A *high schooler*.

“Run that by me again,” he said incredulously, “because I’m pretty sure you just said that I’ll actually have to *work* with one of those snot-nosed brats.”

“*Tony.*” Her voice was full of exasperation. “They’re fifteen and sixteen years old, not five and six. If you had paid attention to *any* of the meetings you’ve shown up to—or the ones you *didn’t* show up to—you would know that PR has been pushing for some good publicity lately. With everything that happened a few months ago and the fact that you’ve come up with no new projects lately, the public can’t decide whether or not you’re still to be trusted. Therefore, they came up with the idea of you working with a high school intern on a project for a few months and then the both of you presenting it together.”

“I’m sorry all I heard was that I’d have to work with a *kid*. *In my personal lab*. Pep, you *know* that I don’t get along with kids.”

“It’s just for a few months, Tony,” Pepper sighed. “The minimum requirement is two four hour days a week and the internship ends in June. That’s three months and around twenty-four days total. It’s not a lot. The project doesn’t have to be anything special, either. It could be something old; just mentor the kid a little, teach them what it’s like to be an intern at the company, and then you’re done.”

Tony pursed his lips. He really didn’t like the thought of working with a kid, especially not knowing whether or not they would trip over themselves at the sight of him. But, he also couldn’t just back out of this. As Pepper said, the company was really in need of good press and while that didn’t necessarily mean that *he* had to be involved, it was better that he was and he couldn’t back out of the deal he’d made, even if he didn’t know it at the time.

“Okay, two things,” Tony said. “One, I get to choose the kid, and if it doesn’t work out then they’re getting booted to normal intern level, and two, you get me out of as many meetings as possible and I’ll meet with the kid for *three* days a week. How’s that sound?”

Pepper looked to be mulling it over. “How do I know that you won’t do the project yourself and will just have the kid sit there doing nothing?” she asked suspiciously.

“You know what? Final offer. I’ll take this whole thing seriously. I’ll be a mentor to the kid; I’ll teach them some things, let them work on some of my own stuff for the company, I’ll give them a brief overview of how the company works, show them what it’s like to be an intern at SI, and we’ll present a project of the kid’s choosing at the end of three months. But since I’ll be taking my mentor role seriously, I won’t be able to spend a lot of time in the company—such as, say, going to meetings.”

“If you last at least a full month without slipping, cancelling days and not rescheduling them, or

firing your chosen intern, then I will keep any meetings you have to attend for the next few months few and far apart. You will also send me weekly progress reports on your progress,” Pepper bargained before stretching out a hand. “Do we have a deal, Mr Stark?”

Before Pepper had the chance to retract the deal, Tony clasped Pepper’s hand in his. “You have yourself a deal, Ms Potts.”

Pepper smiled, wished him a good day, and left for her meeting. When Tony stepped into the elevator to go to his lab, he had a feeling that he had somehow gotten the short end of the stick.

Tony blew out a bored breath. He’d completed the arm prosthesis Pepper had been bugging him about and he had viewed some of the late winter intern projects like she had asked. He still had the paperwork to do, but he was pretty sure his eyes would start crossing if he tried to read anything. He leant back against the workbench and stared at the ceiling blankly. He was exhausted but he didn’t want to end up with a flipped sleeping schedule, especially if he had to keep up with a kid in the afternoon.

His eyes drifted around the workshop, looking for something to do. Most of the things he had lying around were old projects and none of them he particularly felt like working on. Spinning on his stool, Tony’s eyes fell on the half-eaten bag of sun chips he got from the vending machine an hour or so ago, bringing up the memory of the kid who’d elected to get chips instead of whatever his chefs were offering.

The kid had said that he was on a field trip. Was it the one that Pepper had been talking about? The one where some of the students were going to get an internship at SI, where one of the students would become *his* intern? The one he’d promised to spend on average twelve hours a week with?

“Hey, Fri, who was the kid I was talking to on the cafeteria floor?” Tony called up to the ceiling. “The one with the floppy curly hair and the Cheetos?”

“His name is Peter B. Parker; he is a part of the tour group from Midtown School of Science and Technology’s Academic Decathlon, which is currently being led by Amy Donohue,” Friday responded promptly.

“Peter Parker, huh?” Tony murmured. “Get me everything you have on him on my screen, will you?” He figured that since he had to choose one of the kids from the tour group, that it would be better to choose a kid he’d already met and kinda got along with.

A hologram screen lit up in front of Tony, multiple files on Peter Parker opening along with a video of one of the intern labs where the kid was working, hunched over a workbench with tools sprawled around him. Tony glanced at the time and realized that it had been over an hour since his encounter with the kid, and if he was correct, then the kid’s tour should be ending in another hour.

“What’s the kid doing?” Tony asked Friday. Pepper had mentioned some sort of test that the kid’s tour group was doing, but he didn’t remember the exact details.

“Mr Parker is currently fixing an incomplete intern project for the internship test Ms Potts devised,” Friday responded. *“I believe Ms Potts’s intention is for yourself and R&D’s internship department to review the Academic Decathlon group based upon how they handle stress and problem-solving in a short time span.”*

“This is for the internship, right? I get one kid and everyone else grades their projects or whatever

to see if they're 'worthy'?" Tony asked.

"That is correct."

Tony hummed and idly watched as the kid, Peter, messed with the wiring of a small robot. He rewound the footage to when the kids chose their projects and wondered what the hell the kid had thought when choosing the drone. Instead of choosing the mostly completed projects like a few robotic arms or partially broken robots, he instead picked up a sad little drone that had chunks of it missing and looked like it had been sat on by the Hulk at some point. To think of it, Tony was pretty sure he recognized the little thing. Maybe it *had* been sat on by a large, green Bruce at some point...

He sped through the footage, ignoring all of the other kids except for Peter. Other than some initial fluttering about—no doubt the kid trying to decide what he should fix first—the kid confident in his movements as if he messed with broken technology a lot. He moved around the drone with sure hands, popping off little pieces gently before trying to figure out what was wrong with it.

After a few minutes of watching the kid work, Tony had to admit that he was surprised at how intelligent Peter seemed. Where the kid had been nervous and stuttery when he met him, the kid was now in his element. He easily seemed to identify what was wrong with the little drone and knew how to fix it. While he knew that he would have to review the work of the other kids even if he chose Peter, Tony decided to check out what Friday had managed to find about the kid.

Peter Benjamin Parker, fifteen years old, birth date August 10th, 2001, Tony mentally rattled off. Born to a Mary and Richard Parker, who... died in a plane crash in February of 2006. Oof. Tony winced slightly at that and his sympathetic frown turned into a grimace when he learned that both of Peter's remaining relatives, May and Ben Parker, had died a year and a half ago. Friday brought up a newspaper about their deaths—a mugging gone wrong, apparently—and the kid's social services files said that the kid had been there when it happened.

"Oh, kid," Tony muttered. He didn't dig any further and instead turned back to watch the kid work. He hadn't shown any signs of being nothing but a nervous kid when Tony had met him earlier, though as he looked at the kid clearly, he could see the remaining signs of grief. The kid's clothes hung off his small frame (damn, the kid was short *and* tiny) and his curly hair was long and messy as if it hadn't been cut in a while. Peter also looked like he needed a good meal, which he could sympathize with. When Tony's own parents had died, he had done nothing but curl up in his room or the workshop, refusing to eat or bathe. Obidiah hadn't truly bothered to help him (no wonder why, he mentally scoffed, thinking about how the bastard had orchestrated his kidnapping) and it was Rhodey who had managed to pull him out of his slump. He'd lost a good twenty pounds, his hair had been a ratted greasy mess, and he'd been starving.

Tony watched as the kid worked for a few more minutes. The video was now live and from what he could see, the kid had done a really good job at repairing the little drone. At some point, the kid had also brought up the drone's coding and had tweaked it a bit. The drone was now hovering in the air over Peter's hands, its little cameras scanning Peter's face.

The kid had done a *really* good job repairing the drone, Tony thought, and he knew that he didn't even have to view the other kids' work.

He wanted Peter Parker as his intern, effective immediately.

Feel free to leave a comment and don't feel shy about asking any questions!

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Slight warning for more... adult themes, though nothing graphic

Chapter Notes

Slight warning for more... adult themes, though nothing graphic

Peter ignores Ned's stare. When he had woken up this morning, his vision was so bad that he had to dig his glasses out of one of the few boxes tucked away in his small closet. His vision had been going blurry steadily for the past few months ever since May and Ben died and he hasn't been getting fed enough. It seems that he's getting weaker as time wears on. Peter's getting scared that if he doesn't get fed properly soon, that he may lose his spider powers.

And he *can't* lose them. He may not be able to go on patrol as often as he would like, but he lives for those nights where he can swing throughout the city, saving and helping people wherever he goes. Not to mention how helpful his healing factor has been lately.

"What?" Peter hisses to Ned as he continues staring at him, finally fed up with the looks.

"Since when do you need to wear your glasses?" Ned blurts out. Peter just sighs and shrugs.

"I haven't been feeling good lately and my vision's been getting blurry," he says, trying to sound casual. "I just see better with them today. I'm pretty sure I won't have to use them in a few days when the cold passes." Peter shrugs off Ned's suspicious gaze and focuses on his school work. He doesn't want to fall behind again and risk Dr. Malek hurting him. Again.

Peter relaxes when Ned turns away, though his spidey sense points out the occasional glance his friend sends him. Peter would feel happy that Ned's worrying so much about him but he's fine. No one needs to worry about him. It's not like living with Dr. Malek is *that* bad. Like, sure, he kinda insults him or makes mean remarks, and sure, he hits him every once and a while, and yeah, he ~~touches him as Skip did~~ scares him. But he's fine. Honestly! He doesn't need anyone to worry about him. He's *fine*.

Peter hides a wince as the shrill bell rings before swiftly closing his notebook and stuffing it in his bag. Just as he's about to exit the door behind Ned, Mrs. Warren calls out, "Peter! I would like you to stay behind for a moment." Nodding towards Ned to go, Peter nervously makes his way up to Mrs. Warren's desk.

"Relax, Mr. Parker, you're not in trouble," Mrs. Warren says as she smiles, making Peter slump slightly in relief. "I just wanted to inform you that I've received an email from Stark Industries. They've accepted you as their intern." Peter's eyes widen and his mouth drops open slightly in shock, making Mrs. Warren laugh softly. She hands out a packet of freshly printed papers, "You'll need to get your guardian to sign these as well as you in order to actually do the internship. You're

going to have to go to Stark Industries tomorrow at nine and get the paperwork all sorted for your internship. I'm not too sure of what you'll be doing, either, though I know that you'll be recreating the project that you did for the test at SI."

Peter takes the papers from Mrs. Warren, still a little shocked at the fact that he got the internship. *Him*. Puny Penis Parker. "T-Thank you, Mrs. Warren," Peter stammers out as he looks at the papers with big eyes. There's a Stark Industries logo in the top left corner of the first page and it just solidifies the fact that he's actually getting the internship. His heart begins to beat swiftly with excitement as a smile lights up his face.

"You should be heading to lunch now, Peter," Mrs. Warren says before nodding towards the door where Ned is standing in the hall expectantly. "You should also tell Ned the good news." Peter bobs his head up and down swiftly.

"Have a great day!" Peter says before practically sprinting over to Ned. "Ned, look!" he hisses towards his friend as they walk down the hall towards the cafeteria. "I got the internship!"

"Holy crap!" Ned says, looking at the papers with big eyes. "You're going to work with *Tony Stark*! Peter, this is so cool! Wait until the whole school finds out! You'd be the most popular person here!" Peter blinks, quickly stopping Ned.

"Whoa, no no no no no, I can't tell anyone! Besides, they won't even believe me if I said I got the internship since Flash wants it!" Peter says. "And besides, I'm not going to be working with Tony Stark himself. I'm probably just going to be a lower level intern since I'm only a high schooler." They walk into the loud cafeteria, making Peter grimace slightly at the loud noises. They've been affecting him a lot lately. It seems that while his vision and his energy has been affected by not getting enough food, his senses have only become out of control. He almost skipped gym because the bouncing of the basketballs was so loud that it sounded like explosions were going off every few seconds.

"Dude!" Ned says as he sits down and takes out his packed lunch. "You're still an intern at SI! How cool is that!?" Peter purses his lips, remembering what Mrs. Warren said.

"*Could* be an intern at SI. I have to get Dr. Malek to sign off on these papers and stuff or else I won't be able to get the internship," Peter murmurs, frowning slightly as he remembers what happened last night. The man had gotten angry at Peter because his English grades were going down. It's not his fault, though! Dr. Malek either makes him stay in his room or do chores when he gets home and he can't even stand to *think* of sitting on his bed while he's in his room to read. He'd sit on the floor, or maybe even the wall or ceiling to read, but he's afraid that Dr. Malek would walk in and see him and do something. Dr. Malek *is* the head researcher at Oscorp, after all.

Ned frowns slightly as he hands Peter his extra sandwich and bottle of water. Ned's been bringing Peter lunch ever since he found out that Dr. Malek hasn't been providing the money for him to buy it. Peter ignores Ned's frown, thanking his friend for the sandwich. They spend the rest of lunch discussing varying things about what could potentially happen tomorrow at SI if Dr. Malek allows Peter to go. He really hopes the man does.

Peter nervously chews on a green bean, eyes flickering up to Dr. Malek's face every few seconds. The man is reading some papers for work and Peter really doesn't want to disturb him. But Dr. Malek will leave early tomorrow for work and this is really the only time that he'll be able to bring up the internship.

He jumps as Dr. Malek sighs and begins to speak, "What is it, boy? You've been shifting nervously all night. What do you want to ask?" Peter nervously moves around a few green beans with his fork before jumping as Dr. Malek bites out, "Stop playing with your food!"

"Sorry, sir," Peter mutters before straightening it up and saying it clearly. Dr. Malek nods as Peter corrects himself and Peter hesitantly brings up the field trip to SI. "Uh, sir, do you remember my trip Stark Industries last week?" Peter gulps slightly at Dr. Malek's raised eyebrow. "Well, sir, we, as in the whole Academic Decathlon team, were told that Stark Industries was interested in getting high school interns, so they tested all of us to see who will be the first. My physics teacher, Mrs. Warren, who was on the field trip? She, uh, she told me that she got an email from SI saying that I, um, that I got the internship."

Peter's explanation started off slow and hesitant at first before turning into a quick nervous ramble. Dr. Malek sets down his fork slowly, making Peter do so as well. "So you're telling me that Stark Industries tested your team for who's going to be their first high school intern and *you* won?" Peter nods hesitantly, ignoring the pang of hurt. Suddenly, the stoic man smiles. "Good job, Pete! Finally, you've done something right."

Peter's lips quirk up hesitantly in a smile. He's just glad that the man has praised him. And he doesn't seem mad about Peter's English grade anymore, so that's a bonus. "Thank you, sir." After a few seconds, Peter says, "Uh, Dr. Malek? My teacher gave me a few papers for the internship. I'll need your permission in order to actually go to the internship tomorrow." Dr. Malek's eyebrows raise.

"Tomorrow?" the man asks. "You'd have thought that they would have given you some time to think it over. Oh, well, bring the papers to me after I've finished eating. It's rude to do work over the table." Peter nods, ignoring the urge to point out that the man had just been reading some papers that have to do with his work at Oscorp.

"I'm proud of you, Peter," Dr. Malek says after they've finished eating and are sitting in the living room. Dr. Malek places his hand on Peter's thigh, squeezing it a little. "I'm really proud of you, Peter Pan." Peter's face pales slightly at the man's hand placement and he barely manages to hide his flinch. *Please, not again.* After a few seconds, the man removes his hand. "Go on to bed, Peter, you have a big day tomorrow. And remember to set your alarm, I won't be here when you wake up. And you need to do the dishes and vacuum before you leave."

Peter swallows, nods, and stands up with his intern papers in his hands. "Goodnight, sir." He forces himself to walk until he's reached the hallway where he sprints silently to his room, refraining from slamming the door as he closes it, swiftly locking it. Peter barely manages to make it to the toilet where he vomits up his dinner. Tears well up in his eyes at the pain as he heaves against the porcelain bowl. Thoughts of Skip flash through his mind, the nicknames he had for him, the way he touched him, ~~the way he held him down and wouldn't let go of him even when he screamed for him to stop~~. Peter's suddenly very glad that Dr. Malek hasn't done anything *too* bad to him. He can handle it. It's only a few touches, after all. Nothing like Skip did to him when he was a kid.

So he doesn't tell anyone. And besides, it's *embarrassing*. He's not a child! He doesn't need to complain about something so small as a few touches ~~even though they bring up memories that he'd rather forget~~. Plus, he's Spider-Man! He should be able to protect himself. He's strong enough. But every time he wants to shove Dr. Malek's hand off his thigh he freezes because what if he *hurts* him. He can't have that happen to him again.

So he doesn't do anything.

Peter's awakened by the shrill beeping his alarm ~~instead of Skip's hands on him~~. He's surprised that he didn't wake up in the middle of the night with cold sweats due to a nightmare of a time when he was small and unable to protect himself and when he thought that friends always did games like that and that it always hurt. Peter shudders and nausea rolls in his stomach. Instead of rushing to the bathroom and gagging into the toilet bowl, he shoves the feeling down. It's a few minutes after seven and Peter goes through the motions of making his bed as he shakes off his thoughts before heading into the bathroom to do his business and shower.

He turns the water so that it's scolding before scrubbing at his skin. The man may not have touched him last night, but he can still feel the touches from last time. He scrubs at the spot on his thigh where Dr. Malek squeezed touched him until it's pink and tender. When Peter finally feels ~~as if the touches aren't still happening and he's not being hurt~~ clean enough, he turns off the water and swiftly scrubs his skin until it's even pinker than when he was in the shower.

Peter feels better when he puts on his clothes, his only pair of non-ripped dark blue jeans and a red shirt covered by Ben's old dark gray jacket, his glasses, and his ratty converse. They're the only pair of shoes he has since Dr. Malek won't take him to get a new pair. Peter doesn't want to bother the man with a new pair of shoes anyway. They may be around three years old, but they're still fine. Yeah, he's had to glue the soles down and stuff, but they still work and fit good.

Peter quickly does the dishes after eating a bowl of cereal and a banana. It doesn't take long to finish vacuuming, either, so he's out of the door with his papers by eight. It'll take him around fifty minutes to make it to the Tower. It'll take him around ten minutes to get to the metro station, thirty minutes for the whole ride, and around ten more minutes to get to the Tower if there are no problems. Hopefully, no Parker Luck will mess up his chance to getting on the Tower on time with a few minutes to spare.

Peter barely makes it onto the train on time because there was some sort of blockade happening due to a car accident. He has to run all the way to the Tower to actually make it on time. After checking his phone, Peter sighs. He's five minutes early.

He fixes his curls and pockets his phone, walking into the Tower anxiously. It's still as mesmerizing as it was the first time around. High ceiling, large windows, people in business garb walking everywhere. He suddenly feels out of his place in his jeans and converse.

Nervously, he approaches the desk. It's the same receptionist as last week and he smiles slightly at her. "Um, excuse me, miss?" She looks up from where she was typing and smiles slightly at him. "Um, I'm P-Peter Parker. I'm here because of the internship?" He holds out his slightly crinkled papers and she takes them, making Peter blush at how crumpled they are. At least the ink isn't smudged.

"Ah, yes, Peter Parker. The first high school intern," the receptionist says with a smile. She grabs something and holds it out to him. "Here's your badge. Go ahead and jump into the elevator over there. Just ask Friday to take you up to the labs on floor seventy-nine." Peter takes the badge with awed eyes before following the woman's finger into the slightly hidden elevator.

The doors automatically open and Peter steps into the small space, nervously pulling his badge over his head. He looks down at his badge. It's much like the last one, except instead of being white, it's red and gold like the Iron Man armor. Like the last one, it has his school picture, and under it, it says *PETER PARKER*. And, instead of the expected *INTERN* under it, it says, *PERSONAL INTERN*.

Peter jumps as a cool Irish voice asks him, "*Where to, Mr. Parker?*" Peter blinks.

“Uh, um, can-can you take me to the labs on floor seventy-nine?” Peter asks. Peter's stomach clenches slightly as the elevator begins to rise and he anxiously waits as he tries to control his breathing. *I'm fine. It's all fine. I'm not under tons of rubble. I'm fine. It's all okay.*

Almost ten seconds later, the elevator doors open. That was fast. Peter hesitantly makes his way out of the elevator. There are two doors in front of him and loud music can be heard from behind them. Is this where he's supposed to go? He knocks on the doors and jumps slightly as the music is shut off a few seconds later.

“Come on in, kid!” he hears a suspiciously familiar voice say. Shrugging nervously to himself, Peter pushes open the door.

And for the second time that week, he's meeting Tony Stark.

Chapter 4

Tony managed to go to sleep at a decent time so he's actually awake and coherent when Friday informs him of a certain curly-haired boy standing outside his lab doors. Gesturing for Friday to turn off his music, Tony shouts, "Come on in, kid!" without looking up from where he's working on something that's surprisingly not Iron Man related.

Tony hears the doors shut and then silence. After a few moments, he looks up from where he was messing with some wiring for a new SI project, a hopefully completely capable arc reactor car, to see one Peter Parker who looks absolutely *frozen* in awe. Tony perks an eyebrow up, "Kid?" he asks, snapping Peter out of his awe and shock. The boy's head snaps over to him so hard that his glasses almost fly off his face. Peter swiftly fixes his glasses and looks at Tony with wide eyes.

"Y-y-you're Tony Stark," the boy stutters out.

"And you're Peter Parker," Tony replies.

"I-I, I'm confused." The boy has on this terribly adorable look of confusion on his face, and if Tony *wasn't* a man in his late forties and if Starks aren't made of iron, he'd be cooing at the boy. Instead, Tony wipes his hands on an oily rag before standing up with a grin.

"What's got you confused, kid?" Tony asks, eyebrow raised. Of course, he knows what the boy's confused about, but Peter doesn't know that.

"I-I thought that I..."

"... Was going to be a low-level intern?" Tony finishes, making Peter nod in relief. It seems the kid's a little star-struck. Tony seems to have that effect on people. "Nah," Tony says, shaking his head and walking up to the kid. "I saw your project for the internship, and I decided that I wanted you as my personal intern. I gotta say, even though that little robot didn't work, the coding was *fantastic*." The kid pales slightly when Tony says his robot didn't work and Tony is quick to fix the kid's confidence. "Like I said, kid, that coding was amazing *and* advanced, kid. Makes me wonder where you learned it all."

Peter just blinks, probably getting over the whiplash that is Tony Stark. It takes a few seconds, but the kid realizes that Tony's waiting for an answer. Peter shrugs, "I-I just re-read a lot and-and my sch-school has a robotics club. Honestly, sir, it w-wasn't that ad-advanced and I was alr-ready coding and building it at home."

Another pair of raised eyebrows and a low whistle is Peter's reply. "Pretty advanced for a few books," Tony comments. "I'm assuming since you mentioned a robotics club and that you're building this ridiculously advanced robot at home that you've got some experience under your belt." Peter nods hesitantly and Tony gestures over to the lab table. "Let's sit down while we discuss your project. I'm getting a little tired of standing here." Peter practically skitters away from Tony when he goes to guide Peter over to the table with by putting his hand on his shoulder. He raises an eyebrow and drops his hand but says nothing. Internally, his heart aches slightly. He remembers doing the same thing when he was younger.

Taking a seat next to Peter, far enough that there are at least a foot and a half of space between them, Tony asks, "Where did you get the idea for the robot, R.A.D. was it?" Peter blushes slightly, most likely due to the name. Tony would never admit it but he looks adorable with his long curly hair and glasses and the blush. "Great name, by the way, what does it stand for? I know your

project has something to do with anxiety since I read that little info sheet you made."

"Oh, uh, R.A.D st-stands for, um, Robot for Anxiety Detection, sir." Peter shrugs and fiddles with the sleeves of his jacket as he continues stuttering. "It's s-supposed to be ab-ble to help kids w-with anxiety? Like, like with panic attacks and st-stuff. It's supposed to-to, um, be able to detec-detect heartbeats. If y-you show signs of an-anxiety, it's supposed to be able to do a lot of-of things. Like, um, play music? And, uh, press against your chest? I r-read that weight is s-supposed to be able to, um, ground you or something? Yeah." Peter nods his head as if to confirm his thoughts.

Tony smiles at Peter. The kid seems really nervous, and polite, too. "Okay!" he says, clapping his hands and rubbing them together, "First, enough with this 'sir' business, you can call me Tony or whatever, and second, let me show you around the lab lay down some ground rules, then we can decide what we're gonna do for your robot. See what materials you're going to make it out of and how you're going to code it." Tony mentally winces as the kid flinches at the clap and he notices how he shrinks into himself when the man mentioned the rules. Filing that information away for later, Tony stands up, gesturing for the kid to follow him.

He steps away from the tables and gestures to the whole room. "This is the lab where we will be spending the majority of our time. You'll have your own station over there, I just haven't gotten around to setting it up yet. Of course, you can use any of the tables, but most of them are covered in a few projects that you'll be helping me with." Peter nods and blinks and Tony gestures to the half-assembled engine for his hopefully arc-reactor powered car. "I typically work on my cars in the workshop downstairs, but since it's arc powered, I decided to assemble a prototype engine up here. We'll spend some time down there when I finish the engine and I can show off some of my cars to you."

Tony walks around the lab, gesturing towards separating things and pointing them out. "Those are my older suits. You can look but don't touch them unless I tell you to. They're programmed to attack any unauthorized people. I'll add in your facial scans and fingerprints later... This is the chemistry lab. It's in a separate area since I don't want chemicals screwing with my air in the main lab area. I'll get to the rules for here a little later...

"These are the bots, Dum-E and U. Dum-E has some sort of fetish with putting oil in my coffee, so don't accept one from him," the little bot beeps angrily, causing Peter's eyes to widen slightly in surprise, "and he's also obsessed with my fire extinguisher, so don't go anywhere near him when you're testing out something. I can't tell you how many times I've had to put the dunce hat on him after he's accidentally, or at least I *think* was accidental, sprayed me," Dum-E whirrs softly with the fire extinguisher, as if apologizing and Peter actually looks *bad* for the annoying machine, God bless him. "U tends to clean up the spills that Dum-E makes but he also tends to record the lab with that little camera of his." U turns to Peter and the camera flashes slightly as he makes a picture, making the kid blink in surprise.

"... These are the holograms for when we work on things. You can get Friday to pull some up near your workstation so you don't have to walk all the way over here. This area is mainly for initial brainstorming and when I need to stretch my legs... And this is the couch that Pepper made me put in here for when I spend all night in the lab and the fridge for the same purpose as well."

Tony turns to Peter. "You can go ahead and grab whatever you like out of here. It's always stocked with food and it needs to go somewhere since I don't always remember to eat. Don't be shy, go ahead and grab a coke or something, honest, I won't be mad." Peter nods his head slowly and pulls out a coke after Tony's grabbed himself one.

"Thank you, Mr. Stark," Peter murmurs, low but clear.

"No problem, kiddo," Tony says, noticing the way Peter's hesitant to grab anything. He walks over to the couch and takes a seat, gesturing for Peter to do the same. Once the kid's seated, he starts, "As I said earlier, there are some ground rules." Tony notices the way Peter hunches in on himself but he continues. "Simple enough, if you're working with electronics, please keep any and all liquids away from them, and I'd appreciate you wearing gloves but you don't have to. Same goes for food, keep it away from your project unless it's something that's not messy like gummy bears or something. When you're working with chemicals, please tell me or Friday which ones you're using and what for. I don't want you to end up like a cartoon character after an explosion. Also, goggles, please, I don't need you going blind." Tony chuckles slightly as Peter smiles at the joke before continuing with the last rule. "Okay, last rule, and I honestly think that it won't apply to you, but don't do anything stupid, like putting sodium or potassium in water. And no touching any weapons in here unless I say you can."

Peter blinks at the rules and Tony thinks that the kid expected something a little more strict.

"You get all that?" he asks.

"I, I think so?" Peter says, holding a hand up and ticking off the rules. "No l-liquids near electronics, w-wear gloves, no m-messy food near stuff, um, t-tell y-you or Fr-Friday about chemicals, g-goggles, a-and, uh, nothing st-stupid and no weap-weapons?" Tony nods his head with a grin and notices how the kid relaxes slightly as he sees that he got all the rules down.

Tony refrains from clapping as he says, "Good! Now that that's all done, why don't we go over some schematics for your project? Or do you want to work on the car with me?" Peter thinks it over for a few seconds before his eyes flicker over to the car.

"We can, uh, work on the, um, car, Mr. Stark," Peter says. Tony nods his head and leads Peter over. They end up discussing the pros and cons of using a modified arc reactor and Tony's surprised at how well the kid can keep up with him. He knew Peter was smart, especially for a fifteen-year-old, but he didn't know he was *this* smart. This kid can probably keep up with the best of them.

It's nearing around one o'clock when Tony hears it. A silent rumble. He looks up and over to where Peter's working with something on the engine. The kid hunches in on himself and one pale skinny arm kind of loops around his stomach. Other than that, Peter doesn't do anything. Tony frowns. The kid's obviously hungry, and since Peter took off that old jacket, he can see how skinny the kid is. He can practically see the boy's ribs through his worn red science shirt.

Checking the time, Tony realizes that it's past lunch. Not wanting to embarrass the kid, Tony waits around ten minutes before dropping his pliers and stretching. Noticing the kid looking over at him, Tony asks. "Are you hungry? It's already past lunch. I think I'm going to order a pizza. You want one?" Peter looks at Tony with big eyes and Tony hides the frown that wants to form on his face. He had noticed it earlier while working close together on one part of the engine. The way Peter shrunk away from him and didn't say or ask anything unless Tony asked for his thoughts first.

Peter shakes his head slightly and plays with the tab from his empty coke. "N-No, I'm, uh, I'm fine Mr. Stark. You don't have-have to get m-me any-anything." Tony perks and eyebrow at the kid.

"Kid, I'm already placing an order. An extra pizza won't hurt. Go ahead, order one. I think I'm going to get a large meat lovers, you can go ahead and get a large, too." Peter looks down for a few moments before looking up at Tony. When he speaks, his voice is timid.

"Can... Can I h-have a, um, large pep-pepperoni?" Tony smiles slightly in triumph. He got the kid to order something for himself.

"You got that Fri?" Tony asks the AI.

"Ordering one large meat lovers and one large pepperoni," Friday says, causing Peter to jump. It's not the first time Friday spoke up today, but every time Peter has jumped. *"Would you like anything else, Boss?"*

Tony perks an eyebrow at Peter who shakes his head. "Nope. Thanks, Fri." The AI becomes silent and the two go back to working on the engine before Friday speaks up again.

"Sir, the pizzas have arrived. Would you like me to send an intern to bring them up?"

"Nah, the kid and I can get them," Tony says, sitting up and cleaning his hands on a towel. Peter does the same. "Come on, Pete, we're going up to the penthouse to eat." Peter's eyes widen and he sputters unintelligible sentences.

"W-Wait, wh-what? We don't have to, Mr. Stark. I-I'm perfectly f-fine eating in here." He waves his hands around frantically and Tony raises an eyebrow.

"You may be fine eating off an oil-stained workbench, Pete, but I'm not," Tony says, causing Peter to blush and shrink in on himself. "Besides, we've been in here for what? Three, four hours? We need a little break." Peter nods mutely and Tony feels kind of bad for embarrassing the kid, but he's not about to let him eat in the lab. It needs some time to air out and the fans can get annoying sometimes.

Tony gestures for Friday to air out the lab as he shuts the door behind Peter, jumping into the elevator. Tony pulls out a hundred and slaps it into the delivery boy's hand before grabbing the pizza, Peter reaching out to grab them. Tony just hands him his and Friday takes them up to the penthouse. Peter freezes slightly as the doors open to reveal the clean and modern living room and kitchen.

Instead of bringing Tony up to the common room ~~which he hasn't been in since Siberia because all he can see are the ghosts of what were supposed to be his friends~~, Friday actually brings them up to Tony's and Pepper's penthouse. It's empty, of course, since Pepper went on a work trip to California the other day and won't be back until Monday.

Tony's setting the pizza on the coffee table in the living room when he notices that Peter's not behind him. Looking back at the elevator, Tony spots Peter meekly holding the pizza with a worried expression. "What's up, kid?" Tony calls out, making Peter blink at him.

Peter shifts on his feet as he answers, "Are-Are you s-sure you want me in-in here...? I'm, uh, kinda dirty..." Tony perks and eyebrow and looks over the kid. In truth, the kid's got oil smudges on his arms and hands and his jeans have a few stains on them as well. But so does he. And the couch is dark blue, so who cares?

Tony waves the kid. "It's all good, kid, come on in. You're not the only one who's dirty. I can't tell you how many times I've had to replace carpet before deciding to just tear it out and put in hardwood flooring and tile." Peter cracks a smile and hesitantly makes his way towards the living room. Tony heads into the kitchen, "I know you had a coke earlier, but you want something to drink?" Tony opens the fridge and pulls out a bottle of water for himself, peering around the fridge to look at Peter who just shrugs at him. "Water it is..." he says, almost to himself as he pulls out another bottle.

He tosses the bottle to Peter, who pulls it out of the air easily and swiftly. Tony whistles softly and Peter freezes, "Nice reflexes you got there, kid." Peter blushes and Tony thinks the kid does that a

lot. "Hey, Fri, go ahead and put on a movie. I think we need a little time away from the lab." Tony sits down a few feet away from Peter and tucks into his pizza as a cartoon movie comes on. "Really, Fri? Disney?"

"I believe your usual choice of movies are inappropriate for Mr. Parker," Friday says, and this time it's Tony that has to hide the blush. Jeez, he doesn't even *blush*. Why is he doing it now? He rolls his eyes and replies to the AI, aware that Peter's mind may be going into the gutter. Doesn't matter how innocent the kid looks, he's still a teenager.

"The new Jigsaw isn't *that* bad Fri," he says.

"I believe that something that gory shouldn't be viewed by Mr. Parker," Friday insists.

Tony humphs. "Fine, *Big Hero 6* it is."

Tony doesn't mention it but he notices the smile on Peter's lips. He rolls his eyes and watches the movie, slowly getting engrossed into the storyline. Tony wasn't allowed to watch kiddy shows as a kid, most of his childhood being filled with National Geographic films or Captain America documentaries. He's not too engrossed to not notice the way the kid shakes slightly as the fire in the big warehouse starts and how the kid excuses himself for the bathroom. The kid doesn't return until well after the scene and Tony suddenly remembers that the kid's an orphan and that his family had died. It must remind him of their deaths, Tony thinks to himself.

He doesn't say anything when the kid comes back.

Soon enough, the one movie turns into two, and that movie turns into the two geniuses discuss things about the absolutely *horrible* electronics and inventions in the movie. Peter begins to shift around at around four o'clock, looking down at his phone with a worried gaze. "You gotta get home, kid?" Tony asks.

Peter's head whips up to him and he nods his head. "Uh, yeah, I, uh, kinda h-have some ch-chores I gotta do? Be-Before my foster dad comes home? S-So..." Tony nods his head though he doesn't understand why the kid's so worried. Maybe he was supposed to do the chores earlier but neglected them for the internship.

"Yup, that's okay, kid," Tony says, standing up and gathering up their pizza boxes. Tony's still has a few pieces that he'll be definitely eating for dinner and for breakfast tomorrow. Peter had managed to polish off his box and Tony marvels how the kid managed to fit a large pizza into that skinny body, but he guesses the kid needs it. Maybe there's not enough food at home? But that wouldn't make sense what with the money the government gives the families who foster and the foster father's job at Oscorp.

Something's going on, Tony decides, but first, he's got to see the kid off.

He walks Peter to the door, dropping the pizza boxes on the counter as he passes it. "Hey, kid, before you go, I just want to tell you that you should be coming in on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. I can switch around days and add or remove some if you need me to, but that's what I have set up so far. Also, I'd like it if you stay until at least seven since you'll be getting here at around three-thirty to four. Of course, I can switch up the times if you can't stay out that late, but we've got some work to get done and I kinda need you here for at least a few hours."

Peter nods nervously. "O-Okay, Mr. St-Stark," the boy says, fixing his glasses. "I'll, um, have to, uh, speak with my foster dad to-to see if I can come home later than normal." Tony nods. That sounds reasonable.

"Oh, I'll also have my driver pick you up from school and drive you home, so no worries about transportation, kid," Tony adds as the kid gets in the elevator. Just look out for a large black expensive SUV. He should be standing outside it too. He's a big guy with sunglasses, so you shouldn't miss him." Peter nods.

"O-Okay, Mr. Stark. S-See you on Monday?"

"See you on Monday, Peter," Tony confirms. The elevator doors close and Tony feels oddly lonely. He hasn't been with the kid for even a full day and he's already missing his company.

Fuck. He's getting attached. ~~But maybe that's not such a bad thing.~~

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

I just wanted to clarify that in my "author's note" earlier I wasn't asking for people to tell me how good my writing is. I love to read comments, especially if you actually talk about the story. Like, tell me what you think will happen in the next chapter, what you think may happen in the future as a whole. Tell me what you would have written differently or tell me what I've done wrong. Reading comments give me inspiration and I don't want people feeling like they have to say something generic like "I really liked it. It was good." every chapter. If you don't want to comment, you don't have to. I would appreciate it, though. Comments make me happy and make me feel that people really like the story and they're interested in reading it until I've ended it. I'd love to read your thoughts! Go ahead and share them! If we have differences in opinions, then feel free to hash it out with me. That's all, folks. Have a great night (or day)!

Also, I'm interested in a soulmark AU, are you?

Edit: SORRY FOR ALL OF THE NOTIFICATIONS! I KEEP MAKING MISTAKES!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The beeping of his alarm alerts Peter that he didn't have a nightmare. He swiftly turns it off even though he knows that Dr. Malek is already awake. School might not start until seven-thirty, but Peter has to wake up at around six forty in order to get there in time after changing. Of course, there's also the fact that Dr. Malek may allow Peter to have breakfast and Peter's not sure if that's a blessing or a curse. Eat and spend minutes alone with the man, or head straight to school on an empty stomach? Peter's sure his stomach will decide for him, that is if Dr. Malek offers breakfast, which Peter kinda doubts.

Pulling himself out of bed, Peter dresses in one of his punny science shirts and his regular jeans and sneakers. He shivers and winces as he changes. It's getting colder out and his spider senses don't seem to like that, especially if he's patrolling. Last year had been hell for Peter. Of course, Peter had just gotten his spider powers and then his aunt and uncle died and it was winter and Peter can't afford new clothes. The only thing Peter could do was throw on long sleeves and sweaters and his Uncle Ben's old coat that he managed to snag.

Peter's suddenly glad that he thought to grab the coat. His uncle had always worn it and now Peter's wearing it. Sometimes, he thinks he can still smell the man's cologne on it. He can't wear the coat during patrol, however, so Peter's hoping that the constant movement will help. He knows he felt a little frosty last night when he was out and he's feeling the bruises burning on his ribs since he was a little stiff due to the cold and could move out of the way quick enough. It's safe to say that Peter's very glad that it's becoming spring.

Peter makes his bed in a swift and stiff movement before using the bathroom. He makes sure that the comforter is straight and his pillows are fluffed out. Dr. Malek demands a perfect clean room and one time Peter had been struck for a stray shirt on the ground before bed. Hearing Dr. Malek moving around and making himself breakfast, Peter's stomach rumbles. He puts the thought of

food away for favor of brushing his teeth and hair. He frowns. His hair is getting longer and it partially covers his eyes. He'll have to cut the curls soon.

Wiping off his glasses, Peter places them on the bridge of his freckled nose. He looks at himself in the mirror. His glasses do little to hide the bruises beneath his eyes, though they do help a little. They look as dorky as they did two years ago, all rectangular and thick-framed on his face. Fixing his curls, Peter pulls on Ben's old jacket, grabs his backpack, and makes his way out to the living room. He tries to sneak his way past where Dr. Malek is sitting reading the paper and sipping on his unsweetened tea ~~ew~~.

"Peter?" Dr. Malek calls out. Peter freezes and shrinks in on himself at the tone. He turns around, dropping his eyes to his red converse.

"Y-Yes, sir?" he asks. The only time Peter has seen Dr. Malek in the last few days was for dinner after the man checked his chores and last night. They hadn't spoken since Peter told him of how long he's supposed to stay behind for the internship on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. The man had been ticked off that Peter would be getting back at around eight-thirty and had told Peter that he better figure out something for dinner or he wouldn't eat. Peter didn't tell him that Mr. Stark had fed him lunch on Saturday.

"Your internship's today, isn't it, boy?" he asks, voice casual like he hadn't felt up the boy last night. It causes a spark of anger and doubt in Peter. Anger, because what the hell man? And doubt because what if nothing actually happened last night...?

"Yes, sir," Peter answers despite his whirring thoughts.

"You'll be home by eight-thirty, won't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you know what happens when you're late?" Peter's already pale cheeks pale further as he trembles under the man's cold gaze.

"Yes, sir."

"And you won't be late, correct?"

"Yes, sir."

"You are dismissed."

"Yes, sir," he says. Like a broken record. It seems that 'yes, sir' is the only thing he can say.

Peter practically sprints out of the building, hands shaking, heart trembling, and ignoring the urge to retch into the sidewalk. He does, however, duck into the alleyway for a quick breather of the cool air. The sky is dark, the clouds covering the morning sun. It's probably going to rain today and Peter's suddenly glad that he won't have to walk home in it. It does bring him to his next problem, though. The internship, the driver, and Mr. Stark. Peter gags at the thought of being alone with the man. Mr. Stark is his hero, yes, but it seems that all adults have done to him so far is hurt him. Surely, Mr. Stark will be the same?

Shaking his head as a raindrop hits his nose, Peter checks the time. He has twenty minutes to get to school. He can make it there in ten minutes, leaving another ten minutes to talk to Ned before first period starts. Putting earbuds in and putting his phone in his pocket, Peter rushes down the sidewalk with his head down. His spidey-sense alerts him if he's going to bump into something

and he swiftly avoids the people, though it seems that it's getting slower. Peter feels like it has to do with how little sleep he's getting. Even he can admit that it's not healthy to only get a few hours of sleep a day.

As expected, Peter makes it into school ten minutes early. Pulling out his earbuds and putting his phone away, Peter meets up with Ned and MJ (who is a new addition to their meet up) near their lockers and does his handshake with Ned. "How was your internship!?" Ned says a little too loudly. Ducking his head down, Peter shushes him.

"Ned, not so loud!" he hisses. MJ looks up from her book silently with a perked eyebrow. It's the only expression showing her curiosity. After a few seconds, he allows a grin to cover his face. "Turns out I'm Mr. Starks personal intern! I got to work with him for a few hours and we had pizza and watched *Big Hero 6*!"

"You watched a Disney movie with Iron Man?" MJ deadpans. Peter's face turns red.

"I didn't choose the movie! His AI, Friday, did," he defends himself, pulling his books into his arms, wincing as the books press against his ribs. A knowing look enters Ned's eyes and MJ's suddenly interested in him. When he doesn't acknowledge it, she looks back down.

"What kind of things did you do? What did you work on?" Ned asks as they make their way to their shared first-period class.

"Well, he showed me around the lab. It's so cool! Mr. Stark has all sorts of lab tables filled with unfinished SI projects and I'm pretty sure I saw a few things for the Avengers, too! He has this really cool chem lab set up in the back and it has so many chemicals in it! I could make all sorts of things ~~and enhance my webbing!~~ Mr. Stark also--"

"Mr. Stark?" a snarky voice cuts Peter off. "What are you talking about, Penis?" Peter mentally groans as he turns to face Flash.

"Nothing that concerns you, Flash," Peter mutters, trying to push his way past the bully. Flash pushes him back and he flinches as his ribs flare up in pain.

"No, wait a minute. Are you saying that *you* got the internship?" Flash cuts himself off with an obnoxious laugh. "Yeah, sure, because *Stark Industries* would higher a stupid poor orphan like you." Peter grinds his teeth and looks down. Flash laughs again. "Stop trying to make people like you, Penis Parker. No one will believe that *you* of all people got the internship when *I* was there."

"And did you get the internship?" a bored feminine voice asks. Peter looks over to MJ.

Flash scoffs, "Of course I did. They just didn't email me yet."

MJ looks bored. "You do realize that the first day of the internship was on Saturday, right? And Mrs. Watson is the one receiving the emails, not the students." Flash suddenly looks a little put out before his face hardens in anger.

"So?" he says like a snotty brat. "It's not like Penis is telling the truth." Peter, done with Flash's crap, steps around him. He tenses up when the bully grabs his arm with a, "Hey! I'm not done talking to you." Someone, Ned or MJ, rips Flash's hand off him. Peter shrugs off the sudden feeling of nausea and rushes to his first-period class. He, MJ, and Ned barely make it through the door when the bell rings. Peter shrugs off his bag and slumps into his seat, pulling out his notebook and folder to listen to the teacher as he tries to shake away the feeling of Flash's hand on him.

He ignores Ned's and MJ's looks for the rest of the day, instead telling them, quietly, about his day at the Stark Internship and how he's going today. As the bell rings for dismissal, Ned sighs and says in a whimsical voice, "I wish I had your life." Peter rolls his eyes on the outside, but on the inside, he's telling Ned that he'd *hate* to have his life.

Jumping down the steps of the school, Peter stops as he sees a van. As Mr. Stark had said on Saturday, there's a man with sunglasses on. The man's watching everyone from behind his sunglasses and his head turns in Peter's attention. Seeming to recognize him, he waves Peter over. Looking back at a shocked Ned, Peter waves and heads towards the man nervously.

"Peter Parker, right?" the man asks gruffly. Peter nods his head nervously and the man grunts. "I'm Happy. Now get in the car." He opens the door for Peter and all he can think is *ohhhh-kayyy*. He slides into the car and curls up in the seat after Happy's slammed the doors shut, buckling himself in and pulling his chemistry binder out of his backpack to do some homework on the ride to the Tower. Happy doesn't say anything as he jumps in the seat, just slamming the door shut and driving away from the school.

Peter has a feeling that Happy doesn't want to be driving him. He shrinks down in his seat guiltily. Peter doesn't want the man driving him if he doesn't want to. Maybe he can ask Mr. Stark if he can just ride the metro to the Tower and back to Dr. Malek's instead. Peter doesn't dwell on his thoughts long before he's engrossed in his chemistry homework. So engrossed, in fact, that he forgets that he's supposed to be nervous in the car with an unknown man and is shocked when the man in question barks out, "Get out, kid."

Peter flinches against the seat in surprise and turns his wide eyes towards Happy's sunglasses covered ones. The thought of why the man is wearing sunglasses in winter flashes through Peter's mind as he scrambles to shove his papers into his backpack haphazardly. He unclicks his seatbelt and slips out of the van, quickly shutting the door behind him. Not even a second later, Happy's driving off.

Hesitantly making his way towards the elevator, Peter's surprised when it takes him to Mr. Stark's lab immediately instead of him being asked to scan his badge. Peter had hidden the piece of plastic and the lanyard in his backpack and had slipped in on when he was getting his homework out. He yelps when the lab doors open for him. He had opened them himself on Saturday, so he hadn't expected them to be automatic. But considering how the owner of the Tower and the lab itself is Tony Stark, Peter shouldn't have assumed that they were just manual. It makes Peter wonder if all doors in the Tower are automatic.

Shaking his thoughts away, he blinks at the scene in front of him. Mr. Stark is sitting in the center of a circle of a dozen boxes with what looks like a hologram checklist in front of him. At first, Peter thought the man didn't notice him due to the slightly lowered music, but after a few seconds of standing there, Tony looks up and gestures for the music to be lowered.

"Hey, kid! I'm surprised you actually came. Wait, no I'm not. Who would give up the chance to do science with me?" the man quickly rambles, looking slightly less put together than the man Peter is so used to seeing on television. "Anyway!" the man suddenly says loudly, causing Peter to tense up at the noise. "I need your help. Pepper bombarded me earlier and practically cussed me out about how unkempt and dirty the lab is." The man rolls his eyes. "Well, she didn't curse but you get the idea. Back to what I was saying, I need your help separating all of these things to put over there on those," he gestures to the half of the lab that was actually an empty lab hidden behind half-glass walls that is now filled with industrial shelving.

Peter blinks and nods slowly, dropping his backpack on the couch before going up to the man,

suddenly unsure of what he's supposed to do. Honestly, he's a little overwhelmed. There are boxes full of things and there are discarded parts and electronics *everywhere*. How the hell is he supposed to sort all of these!?

Most likely seeing the overwhelmed on Peter's face, Tony speaks up. He points over to a set of boxes to the side of the room, "You can go ahead and mess around with those over there. Just make separate piles of wires and electronics parts and shit. Wait! Don't say that. It's a bad word. Separate the electronics and *stuff*."

Yeah, Mr. Stark seems just a *little* bit frazzled. *Just* a little.

"Yes, sir," Peter says automatically. It gains him a raised eyebrow from the swamped genius. "Yes, Mr. Stark," he corrects, blushing slightly as his slip of tongue. The man had told Peter not to call him sir and he had just done so. At least he doesn't seem too bothered by it. Deciding to ignore what just happened, Peter heads over to the boxes.

He spends much of the day separating out the boxes and ends up helping Mr. Stark with his after finishing his batch. The only blip in their work is when Tony calls for Friday to order the same pizzas as Saturday and they eat it in the lab.

In the end, they end up cleaning up most of the lab and Peter's sent home at seven-thirty. He makes it home on time, thankfully, and feels relieved when he doesn't see Dr. Malek. He can't help but feel happy when he settles into bed, remembering how Mr. Stark seemed shocked and *happy* that Peter finished his work and then decided to help him.

He doesn't what that feeling to go away.

Chapter End Notes

I just wanted to clarify that in my "author's note" earlier I wasn't asking for people to tell me how good my writing is. I love to read comments, especially if you actually talk about the story. Like, tell me what you think will happen in the next chapter, what you think may happen in the future as a whole. Tell me what you would have written differently or tell me what I've done wrong. Reading comments give me inspiration and I don't want people feeling like they have to say something generic like "I really liked it. It was good." every chapter. If you don't want to comment, you don't have to. I would appreciate it, though. Comments make me happy and make me feel that people really like the story and they're interested in reading it until I've ended it. I'd love to read your thoughts! Go ahead and share them! If we have differences in opinions, then feel free to hash it out with me. That's all, folks. Have a great night (or night)!

Also, I'm interested in a soulmark AU, are you?

Edit: SORRY FOR ALL OF THE NOTIFICATIONS! I KEEP MAKING MISTAKES!

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

It's been about two weeks since the internship has started, meaning that Tony's seen Peter a total of six times, his first day included. The kid had managed to stop fully stuttering last week so Tony's assuming the hero worship is finally wearing off. Tony also thinks that it has to do with something else, though.

Each time Peter comes over to the Tower, Tony feels a little more protective over the kid. Peter's different than other kids his age and it's not just the fact that he can easily keep up with Tony in the lab. The kid's small and scrawny, and while Tony can no longer really see the kid's ribs, he still looks unhealthily small. There's also the dark circles beneath his eyes that only seem to be getting darker.

And there's also the flinching and the way that Peter just seems to lock up every once and awhile and not to mention the near panic attack the kid had when Tony accidentally dropped a wrench on the floor.

There's something wrong with the kid and Tony's going to find out what. He has to.

Shaking himself out of his thoughts, Tony looks at the workstation next to his. Peter has been working with Tony at his workstation but it had been getting cramped with their separate projects going on. Peter had started constructing his little robot, of which he refuses to change the name ~~not that Tony's complaining since that's exactly the type of thing he'd call the little bot~~, and there were parts and scraps and wires *everywhere*. It covered the kid's side of the table.

Tony's no stranger to having a disorganized workspace, but even he can admit that it was getting a little cluttered when he was still working on that damn engine and Peter was taking up half of his workspace that he kinda needs so he can work on some of the parts. Not that he's complaining! Tony already loves the kid, he's a genius. But the kid really needs his own space.

And that's exactly what Tony's made him.

Well, he didn't make the workbench. That was already there. It had just been covered in discarded SI projects that Tony refused to let Peter put away when they were organizing the lab. He trusts the kid, but he can't really just let the kid move something important and end up losing some important parts. So, after Tony had cleared off the table, he lugged it over to where his is and tucked it against the wall. He added in some shelves for the kid to put tools and scraps in and he also gave him a StarkPad and stylus to write his notes in.

Tony can't fathom why, but the kid has some sort of fetish with writing things down on paper. Not that he's one to judge, of course, but Tony decided that the kid can't just have papers covering his brand new workstation.

"Boss, Peter Parker has arrived," Friday informs him, causing a grin to form on his face. He can't wait to see the look on the kid's face when he sees the workstation he's kitted out for him. Peter's going to be *thrilled*.

Taking a seat at his own workstation, Tony pulls out his phone to make it look like he wasn't just fretting over a table. He watches the doors like a hawk and takes in the baffled and confused

expression as the kid opens the doors, his eyes flickering over to the table. After a few moments, the kid's brown eyes flicker back over to him.

"Uh, um, Mr. Stark? What-What's that?" Peter asks, pointing over to the table, confusion evident in his tone and on his face.

Not exactly the reaction that Tony was looking for, but he'll deal. An amused smile pulls on his lips and he puts his phone away as he looks at Peter. "What does it look like, Pete? I got you a workbench. Now we don't have to fight over table space," he teases.

"Wh-What? You didn't have to!" Peter sputters, eyes widening as he switches his gaze from looking at the table to looking at Tony. "M-Mr. Stark, I'm perfectly fine working at a lab table!" Tony just rolls his eyes and gestures towards the worktable.

"Just go sit down, kid. All of your stuff's over there on that one lab table. Thought you'd like to put everything where you want to instead of doing it for you," Tony comments, spinning around so he's facing his engine. "Besides, I already had the table. And there's a tablet over there for you to jot ideas down onto since you insist on writing things down instead of having Friday type it out for you."

"Thank you," Peter says meekly, though his voice shines with his gratitude. Tony shoots the kid a grin.

"You're welcome."

The two settle down into their own projects, Friday playing a mixed playlist of both Tony's and Peter's tastes. Tony had noticed Peter working with his earbuds in and had asked the kid if he wanted to play a song. As expected, the kid sputtered that he was perfectly fine and that Tony didn't have to play his music. Tony had just rolled his eyes and told Friday to grab the kid's playlist from his phone. The kid has a surprising mix of modern and older songs, even going as far as sharing some songs that were on Tony's playlist.

Eventually, Friday informs Tony that their food's here. Peter looks up from his workstation with a confused expression, causing Tony to chuckle slightly. "I got Friday to randomize a list of take-out that we both like. It's Thai today," Tony tells Peter, noticing the way the kid's eyes light up. It had been the third time Peter had come over and Tony was bored with pizza, so he had asked the kid what he wanted. It took a few minutes to convince the kid that he was fine with eating whatever, but Peter had admitted that he hadn't had Thai in two years. And that's what they're eating.

Tony wonders if Thai is a thing that he and his parents or Aunt and Uncle used to do. He knows that the kid's parents died when he was a kid, but his Aunt and Uncle had died about two years ago. About the same time, the kid said he had last had Thai. Tony decides that he's going to order the food more often. He doesn't really care about what he eats for dinner, but if Peter admits he likes something, Tony'd decided that he's going to get it for the kid.

"Let's go, kid," Tony says, standing from his worktable and stretching. Peter scrambles off of his bench and trails behind Tony as he jumps into the elevator. Standing beside Peter, Tony watches him out of the corner of his eye. The last time they had been in the elevator together, he had noticed something. The kid's hands had been trembling and his breath had picked up slightly. As suspected, the kid shrinks in on himself and stuffs his trembling hands in the pockets of his worn jeans. Tony had convinced the kid to wear his daily clothes to school instead of those dark-wash jeans he had worn last time. The kid had easily obliged since he had gotten oil on them.

Tony gives his paparazzi smile to the delivery boy, slaps a bill in his hand, and orders Friday to

take them to the penthouse. Eyeing the kid worriedly as he rushes out of the elevator doors open, Tony asks, "You okay, kid?" Peter gives a fake smile.

"Yeah, I'm fine," he says, his voice cracking and causing him to blush. "I just don't like small spaces, that's all." Tony nods sympathetically. While he's not necessarily bothered by small spaces, it can get a little overwhelming if he's stuck in his suit ~~especially since he was stuck in it in the cold after Steve had plunged that shield into his chest and had left him to get frostbite and die.~~

As is now routine, they settle down on the couch, Friday putting a movie on. It's one of the *Star Wars* movies and Peter's eyes light up as the opening credits roll across the screen. That was another thing Tony learned about Peter. He absolutely *loves* the film series. They had watched the first one on Friday and Tony had put the movies on his *Peter's Favorite Movies* list. Next to *Alien*, *Risky Business*, and *Cars 3*. Honestly, this kid has a weird mix of movie tastes but it makes Tony like him even more.

Tony doesn't even realize that it's past eight until the movie's ended and Peter's jumping off the couch. "*Crap, I gotta get home!*" he says, looking at his phone with a pale face. Peter races into the elevator and Tony quickly follows after him, leaving their empty cartons of Thai food on the glass coffee table.

"Whoa, whoa, whoa, kid!" Tony says as Peter rushes to grab his backpack and shove his discarded homework into it. "What's wrong?" Tony places a hand on the kid's arm. Bad move. Peter flinches back so hard that he slams into his workbench. Immediately, Tony takes his hand off Peter and steps back. "Hey, hey, Peter!" the yell gains Peter's attention. "Calm down, kiddo."

"I-I h-h-have to get home. I'm g-gonna be l-late," Peter stutters out, face pale. Tony's face softens at the kid's returning stutter.

"Hey, it's okay, kid," Tony says. "Why don't I drive you instead of bothering Happy? I can just tell your foster dad that we got carried away on a project for the company." Peter bites his lip and nods his head, still looking worried.

"O-Okay," Peter says, hands squeezing around his backpack.

"Good, got everything?" Peter nods. "Let's go."

Tony guides Peter to one of his less flashy cars, an Audi, and heads towards where the kid's foster father lives. Peter doesn't ask how Tony knows where he lives and Tony doesn't mention it. Tony may have sped a little bit in some areas, but they make it to the kid's apartment before nine. As they get out of the car, Tony notices how absolutely *terrified* the kid looks. He's trying to hide it, but it's not working. His whole body is trembling, his gaze won't lift from his feet, and he keeps squeezing the straps to his backpack.

This time, Peter's the one who leads Tony. They head into the elevator, Peter getting pale as every second goes by. "It's gonna be okay, kiddo," Tony murmurs as he knocks on an apartment door, smoothing out his jacket that he had decided to throw on over his *Black Sabbath* t-shirt and jeans. He removes his hand from fixing his sunglasses just as the door opens to one Dr. Malek.

"Hello, I'm Tony Stark, " Tony introduces himself with a paparazzi smile, holding his hand out to the man. "You must be Peter's foster father, Dr. Malek, was it?" The man's cold blue eyes darken as they flicker over to Peter before the man gives a smile towards Tony.

"Ah, yes," the man says, shaking Tony's hand. "To what do I owe the pleasure?" He gestures Tony in.

"I just wanted to drop Peter off myself," Tony says, standing in the foyer next to a silent Peter who seems engrossed with counting the threads peaking through the hole on his right shoe. "I'm sorry he's late, we got engrossed with a project for Stark Industries and the time just flew by. I just wanted to make sure that you understood."

The blonde man is silent for a few seconds before he nods. "Yes, I understand. Though, I must say I'm a little upset that you kept him out later than his curfew. It had been lengthened for the internship, you see, and I can't have Peter getting behind on homework." Tony levels the man with a cold smile.

"No worries," he says. "The first thing Peter here did was do his homework. His education is first priority. Isn't that right, Pete?" Peter jerks up as his name is mentioned. He glances from Tony to Dr. Malek nervously before returning his eyes to his shoes.

"Yes, sir," he says quietly, causing Tony's eyebrows to quirk up slightly. The kid hasn't referred to him as 'sir' ever since that slip up on his second day.

"See?" Tony says anyway, smiling at the kid's foster father. "First priority."

"Good," the man says shortly before changing the direction of the conversation. "Well, it is getting late and I don't want Peter here staying up late if I can help it. Thank you for bringing him home, Mr. Stark, but it really is getting late and I'll be heading to bed soon." Tony nods, suddenly feeling a little uneasy. He can't just barge in and stay here, however, so he turns to Peter.

"I'll see you next week, kiddo," Tony says, trying to catch the familiar dark brown eyes. Peter keeps staring at his shoes.

"Goodnight, sir."

Tony nods, and with one more glance and nod towards Dr. Malek, he leaves the apartment. As he drives away from the apartment complex, he can't help but feel as if he did the wrong thing. He really hopes Peter will be okay. His foster father didn't seem okay with the fact that Peter was past curfew, even if Tony provided a reason as to why they were late. Tony really hopes that he didn't get the kid in trouble. It will tear him apart if he hears that Peter got punished because he couldn't keep track of time.

Chapter End Notes

Hey, everyone, I just wanted to share with you my opinion on something. It's about comments and commenting. For me, when I look for comments, I'm not looking for someone to tell me how great I am, how amazing my writing is. Because, while that is very flattering, that's not what matters. What matters is the story. Not me, the story. I want to see you enjoying the story. I want to see you excited when you see a notification for a new chapter or when you finish a chapter and lust for the next one. I want to see your thoughts and feeling and emotions, because when it comes to the end of the day (or story, rather), I'm not what matters, the story is.

When I see comments about what people think is going to happen next or how they like the way I've written a character, I get happy and proud. Because you understand. You understand what I'm looking for when I get a comment notification. Because while I don't matter, the story does. If I see a comment about just how "good" I am at

writing and nothing more, I get disappointed. Because, as I've said like twenty times now, it's the story that matters. If you comment and don't write about the story, I feel like I've failed. Because, as a writer, I shine throughout my story.

And if you have nothing to say about my story, then you have nothing to say about me.

And trust me, that's the truth. Every author and creator and artist shines throughout their work. Yes, comments about them being amazing or good at something is flattering and makes them happy, but that's not what really matters. Your point-of-view on a piece of work is what matters. Do you understand what I'm trying to portray, do you feel the emotions I've written or drawn or painted, do you like the story? Criticism is important and it can make or break a creator. If I get no criticism, then I may think that I'm amazing at something, or I may think that I'm horrible at something and people don't want to hurt my feelings.

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

Warning: Graphic abuse and cruel language. Don't read if you're uncomfortable with sexual language and triggering for sexual assault. If you don't want to read, skip down to the page break. If you're uncomfortable with guns don't read the italicized section.

This was so hard to write. I feel nauseous and like I'm going to cry. 🤢🤢🤢

Warning: Graphic abuse and cruel language. Don't read if you're uncomfortable with sexual language and triggering for sexual assault. If you don't want to read, skip down to the page break. If you're uncomfortable with guns don't read the italicized section.

Peter flinches backward with a sharp gasp as his cheek erupts in pain, dropping his backpack beside him in shock. He was so focused on mentally begging Mr. Stark not to leave that he didn't realize his already buzzing spidey sense started screaming at him. Stumbling against the door, Peter looks up at Dr. Malek with terror-filled eyes. The man looks angry, no furious, no *pissed*.

"What did I tell you about getting home late?" the man hisses in a low threatening tone, eyes blazing as he corrals Peter against the door. Peter trembles in fear, unable to answer the man. Dr. Malek rushes forward and pulls on the front of Peter's shirt, pulling him forward and slamming him against the door. "What. Did. I. Tell. You?" Peter whimpers in fear as he grabs at the man's hands.

"I-I-I'm-m s-so-sor-ry. It-t won-won't hap-happen ag-again!" Peter stutters out in a tight voice, trying desperately to get out of the man's hold. Dr. Malek doesn't relieve his hold on Peter's shirt as he slams him against the door again, causing him to gasp out as his breath is knocked out of him. "T-to n-no-t t-t-to!" Peter yells out, answering the man's question.

"*Exactly*," Dr. Malek hisses into his face, pulling a hand back and laying a blow to Peter's face. Peter yells out, jerking in Dr. Malek's hold. Snarling low in his throat, the man drags Peter into the living room. "And what did I tell you would happen the next time you get home late?" Peter whines in fear and tugs at Dr. Malek's hold on him.

"No, please!" he yells out, crying out in pain as the man throws him to the floor and sends a foot into his ribs. Tears rush into Peter's eyes as the man's foot hits the bruises that he got on patrol last night. "*Please!*"

"You don't get to beg!" the man bellows, sending blow after blow at Peter's body, hitting his arms and legs and stomach. "You were late, you useless piece of filth! I told you last time to not come home if you're going to be past curfew. And what do you do? *Huh!?* Answer me!"

"P-pl-ple-ase, i-i-it *hurts*," Peter cries out, his voice breaking on the last word as he curls into a ball in a pathetic attempt of shielding himself from the blows.

"Answer me!" Dr. Malek roars. "What did you do, Peter? What did you do you brainless piece of shit?"

"I-I c-came ho-ome!" Peter yells out in a whine, shielding his face with his hands as the man continues to rain blows on him. "S-s-stop! *Stop!*"

"I bet you weren't even doing some sort of project, were you?" the man asks, his voice turning cold and cruel as he sneers down at Peter. "I bet you were servicing him, weren't you, boy?" Peter shakes his head wildly as the man stops hitting him, instead choosing to kneel between his legs, ripping his hands from his face and pinning them to the cold hard floor. Peter hiccups a sob as he clenches his eyes shut, trembling as the man leans over him.

"P-p-please, *no!* I wasn't d-d-doing t-th-*that!*" he wheezes out in pain, voice tight and airy as Dr. Malek presses his knee into the boy's stomach.

"Of course you were, Peter Pan!" the man tells Peter, his voice now a hissed whisper. Peter flinches backward at the nickname, paling even further as the man leans over him. He trembles in fear, pitiful whines and whimpers escaping him at the man's words and position. His breaths come out in gasps, images and feelings flashing through his mind.

~~Skip touching him, Skip pressing him down on his bed, Skip pulling his clothes off him, Skip flipping him over onto his stomach because he's moving too much, Skip touching him *there*, Skip pressing into him and burning and his breaths on his neck and ears and whispers of how good his little *Einstein* is for him.~~

"I bet you got onto your knees like the good little boy you are, didn't you? You little *slut*," Dr. Malek continues, ruthless as he removes his knee from Peter's stomach, instead pressing it into his crotch. Peter whines out in fear, tears escaping his eyes. "You like that, don't you, Peter Pan?" the man coos, probably mistaking Peter's whine for something other than fear.

"*No!*" Peter cries out. "I-I-I d-don't! *Please!*"

"You can't fool me, Petey," the man whispers into Peter's ear, causing him to tremble in fear as nausea washes over him.

"I don't want it!" Peter yells out, writhing in the man's grasp and knocking him in the head with his head. He stills in fear as the man snarls, face scrunching up in fury. "I'm s-sorry! I-I-I'm *sorry!*"

The man pulls back and pulls Peter with him before throwing him onto the floor. Peter yelps as he lands on his hands and knees. His spidey senses flare up sharply, and a second later, a foot is thrown into his stomach. His stomach lurches and his throat burns as stomach acid and the half-digested Thai food he ate merely two hours ago is hurled onto the floor.

Another blow and a furious snarl and Peter's sprawled onto the ground beside his pool of vomit. "You disgusting little brat!" Dr. Malek screams out. "How *dare* you!" Black spots enter Peter's vision at the pain and he coughs. Two more hits and the blackness takes over.

Pain. That's all Peter can feel. His whole body is *aching* with it. He groans out as he rolls onto his side. Did something happen last night? Was he on patrol and fought someone? Maybe the Rhino? He remembers his body feeling the same after that fight...

Wait, no, that doesn't sound right. He hasn't fought the Rhino since last year... Then what happened?

Last night flashes through his mind, causing all of his injuries and his head to throb. He feels nauseous again at the way Dr. Malek accused him of doing *that* with Mr. Stark. His stomach clenches and he dry heaves, whining in pain as tears prick at his eyes. His face scrunches up and

he doesn't attempt to curl up into a ball, his stomach flaring up in pain as the dry heaving slowly stops.

Peter slowly takes in a deep breath, wincing as his stomach and ribs flare in pain, and pushes the thoughts of last night away. He doesn't want to think of what happened, or *almost happened*. He blinks open his eyes, and instead of being on the cold hard floor of the living room, he's on the carpeted floor of his bedroom. Dr. Malek must have dragged him in here. Peter feels the rug burn on his elbows and back.

Peter tries to keep quiet as he pulls himself onto his feet, but he can't help the sharp groan of pain that escapes him as he pulls himself onto his knees. He curses in pain and gasps as he tries to regain his breath. He stills as he hears the front door close. Holding his breath, he listens to see if that was Dr. Malek leaving or coming home. When there are no other sounds, he sighs in relief.

He muffles a cry of pain as he pulls himself onto his feet, stumbling into the side of his bed. A shuddering breath leaves him and he manages to drag himself into the bathroom. He's not wearing his glasses, but his thoughts don't dwell on that, however. They dwell on the fact that his face is a blend of blues and purples and greens and yellows. Peter grimaces and slowly pulls the bottom of his shirt up. His chest and stomach are also a myriad of blues and purples.

It definitely looks like he went through a few rounds with the Rhino.

The only blood on him is from his nose that's also pretty bruised. Peeling off his clothes, Peter jumps into the shower, hissing at the water as it attacks his bruises. He stands in the water for who knows how long, scrubbing at his skin to get rid of the feeling of Skip and Dr. Malek's hands on him. He shudders at the feelings and shoves down the urge to heave again.

And if tears escape his eyes as the water runs over his head, no one has to know.

Once he's dressed, Peter does his chores. He doesn't want to get another beating. And when his chores are done, he ignores his rumbling stomach and curls up on his bed. He doesn't see Dr. Malek until Monday. Since Peter's face is still bruised, Peter's to stay home. This happens for the rest of the week until the bruises on his face are barely visible.

Peter's not looking forward to Monday. He had missed three days of his internship with Mr. Stark and he's worried that Happy won't be there to pick him up or that Mr. Stark doesn't want him anymore since he didn't tell him that he'd be gone. He's also worried that Dr. Malek won't let him go but he hasn't said anything about Peter not being allowed to go. He'll have to ask the man when he comes home from work. Peter's not looking forward to that.

He's curled up on his bed when he hears the door open and close. His face pales slightly and he listens as Dr. Malek places down his stuff from work and looks over Peter's work in the kitchen. He had cleaned it, along with the flooring in the kitchen and living room. After a few moments, Dr. Malek calls out, "Boy, come here!"

Peter immediately slides off his bed and makes his way into the kitchen, head down. "Y-Yes, sir?" he asks, mentally cursing himself as he stutters.

"Sit down," Dr. Malek orders Peter, who automatically sits down at the kitchen table. Peter hears Dr. Malek pull out a chair and he takes a seat himself. "You'll be going to your internship tomorrow. You've already missed three days of it and I don't need Stark getting suspicious. You will be home by eight-thirty or you'll be punished again, you understand me?"

Peter nods his head automatically. "I-I-I understand, s-sir."

"Look at me, boy," Dr. Malek bites out, making Peter's head snap up. Peter meets Dr. Malek's cold ice-blue eyes and feels a chill run through him. He trembles slightly as Dr. Malek continues. "If I feel like Stark knows something, you're done. Understand?"

Peter nods his head shakily. "Y-Y-Yes, s-sir." Dr. Malek seems to relax slightly and he nods his head.

"Good, now make dinner, I'm starving." Dr. Malek leaves to his bedroom, leaving Peter to mentally shout that *he's* starving. Peter has barely eaten anything this week and he's *hungry* and he's *tired*. So so tired. Nightmares have been keeping him up all week, so have the thought of Dr. Malek coming in his room to touch him just like Skip did. Peter's breath hitches at the thought and he swiftly gathers the materials to make food, trying to busy himself so he doesn't have to think about *it*.

Once Peter's finished dinner, he says goodnight to Dr. Malek, and goes into his room.

Peter curls up in his bed and he's asleep the moment his head hits the pillow.

Peter's angry. He's angry and hurt and scared. His Aunt and Uncle saw the bruises on him and he doesn't want them to ask questions about them, but they did, and he snapped at them. He feels bad but he's still angry, so he heads to the convenience store a few blocks away to cool his mind off and get something to drink. He gives the cashier his bottle of Powerade and groans when he's told that he's ten cents short.

"Come on, man, can't you just, I don't know, like, just let me have the drink anyway? It's just ten cents!" Peter tells the man.

"Sorry, kid, if you don't have the cash then you can't get the drink." Peter scowls at the man, swipes his cash out of his hand, leaves the blue drink on the counter, and turns to leave, angry. The back of his neck buzzes softly as a man with greasy hair and beady eyes enters the store. Peter doesn't know why, but he goes to the back of the store and pretends to browse the chips there. He keeps half an eye on the man, wondering why what he's dubbed as his 'spidey sense' is buzzing. The man asks the cashier something about checking for some cigarettes and Peter inhales sharply as the man pulls the cash out of the open register.

The man looks up at Peter with a scowl and Peter makes his way out of the store hesitantly, not wanting to let the man steal but also still pissed that the cashier didn't waive off ten cents. The man tosses him the blue drink but Peter just sets it down on the ice cream cooler and leaves. He may be angry but his Aunt and Uncle raised him not to steal and he's not going to start now.

It's about an hour later that he hears it, a gunshot and a sharp scream that sounds familiar. Face paling, Peter rushes towards the scream, beginning to tremble as another gunshot rings out. His old shoes scuff against the sidewalk as he almost passes the alleyway, his eyes widening at what he sees. The robber he saw at the convenience store is standing there with a gun and a man and women are on the ground. Peter's ears are ringing with the loud noise the gun caused and he can taste the blood in the air. His eyes fall to the man and woman as the robber leaves, his breath leaving him as he shouts, "No!"

He runs to the man and the woman and they're both still alive and Peter cries out at the blood blossoming on their chests. His aunt's scrubs are becoming red and his uncle's science shirt is illegible with the amount of blood escaping his torso. "No! M-May, Ben! No, please! Please please please!" Peter presses one hand to his aunt's chest and one hand to his uncle's chest. They're right next to one another and it appears that his aunt tried to stem the bleeding before she, too, was shot.

Tears make Peter's vision blur. "Please," he says brokenly, staring into his aunt's and uncle's faces. His uncle's already dead so he pleads with his aunt. "May, please. Please don't leave me! I need you. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. I'M SORRY! Pleasepleasepleasepleaseplease, Maymaymaymay, Benbenebenbenben." Aunt May lifts a shaking hand and places it on Peter's cheek.

"It's okay, baby," she chokes out, coughing up blood. "It's okay." Her hand falls and Peter cries out.

"No! NO!!! You're going to be okay! You're going to be okay! May, Ben! Please!" Hands pull Peter away from his aunt and uncle's bodies and he writhes in the person's hold. "No!" he shouts. "Don't take me away! Please! I-I need them! MAY! BEN! NO!"

Peter sits up sharply, a cry getting caught in his throat as his ribs and stomach burn sharply. Tears blur his vision as he trembles, muffled gasps escaping him as he tries to not wake Dr. Malek. He can still feel the blood on his hands and the cold of the air and the ringing in his ears from the gunshots. He throws himself off his bed, ignores the pain, and retches into the toilet. It's still dark out but his window is enough for him to see. He sobs as he pukes up nothing, stomach throbbing painfully.

It's now that he realizes why he felt sick all day and was sitting in his bed all week. It's the anniversary of his aunt and uncle's death. The night he could've stopped their murders. The night that he became an orphan for real and lost everything he loved.

Peter cries until his alarm rings.

Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

Sorry that it's a little late! It took me practically all afternoon and night to write this! I hope you like it! I think this is one of my longest chapters yet. :3

Tony's worried. Peter hasn't been to his internship all week and he's afraid that something happened. Something *bad*. He had seen the way the kid was reacting when he realized that he was going to be late and how he was acting while Tony was talking to the kid's foster father. It reminds Tony of the way he acted around his dad when he was younger and he's afraid that Peter's also being hit because God knows the kid shows signs of abuse and what was up with that wincing last week? He had totally hurt ribs.

"You look like you're trying to contemplate whether or not you're Iron Man," someone says, making Tony jerk up from where he was sitting at his workbench with a sound that *definitely* wasn't a yelp. Stumbling slightly, Tony turns towards Rhodey with surprised eyes. Rhodey also looks surprised. It appears that he also didn't expect to startle the man so much. Tony's surprised ~~and relieved~~ that he didn't pull a gauntlet on his friend.

"I *am* Iron Man," Tony snarks after quickly gathering himself. Rhodey rolls his eyes, his leg braces whirring slightly as he walks towards Tony. It's been almost a year since everything happened and Rhodey's gotten used to the leg braces that Tony's made for him. Tony's glad that his friend can walk again but he can't help the guilt that strikes his heart as he looks at the slightly whirring parts.

"Hey, eyes up here," Rhodey says softly, regaining Tony's attention. "So, what are you worrying about? You look like you just learned you have a kid out there." Silence. Tony just stares at Rhodey who stares right back at him. "Oh, no. No no no no no. Tony, tell me you didn't! You told me that you were always careful!"

Tony scoffs, "I am careful. The kid's not mine, honey bear, don't worry about it." ~~It's probably a little worrying that Tony knows exactly what Rhodey's talking about but whatever.~~

"But there *is* a kid." More silence. Rhodey sighs and walks over to Tony, sitting next to him on the workbench. "What's going on, Tony? You've been locked in the lab for the past few days and, quite frankly, you look terrible. You also look really worried."

Tony purses his lips. It wouldn't *hurt* to tell someone about his suspicions, right? Knowing his best friend's scrutinizing him, Tony reluctantly begins to speak. "About three weeks ago an Academic Decathlon from this tech school came to the Tower. Pepper said that they won the chance to come here and that it was good publicity. She also said that one of the students was going to be given a chance to win an internship. We were between meetings at the time, and you know me, those things are *boring*." Rhodey lifts an eyebrow and Tony continues, letting his worries spill out. "Well, long story short, I decided to get an intern."

"Wait wait wait, you *willingly* decided to spend time with a kid?" Rhodey asks, knowing the man doesn't exactly like to be around kids. He also knows that while Tony puts up a front about thinking children are disgusting, he also loves them. Way back when during their time at MIT,

they would share their dreams in the dark of their dorm. Tony had wanted kids then and he probably wants them now, too, especially since he and Pepper are getting married.

Tony rolls his eyes, "It's not like the kid's five or something. He's a high-schooler, fifteen-years-old." He turns a sharp look at Rhodey. "Can I finish my story now? Thank you. Anyway, the kid, Peter, and I got to spending time together and I'm worried about him. He's pretty quiet and he flinches when I reach out to him and the first time he came here I could practically see his ribs through his shirt! And then last week he was freaking out about being late to get home and he was only fifteen minutes late!"

"Some kids and parents are sticklers for curfew, Tony," Rhodey says, but also acknowledging the fact that the kid could be getting abused at home. God knows how Rhodey recognized it when Tony became his roommate all those years ago.

Tony huffs, "He looked absolutely *terrified*! He was all pale and shaking and probably having a panic attack and I just left him with his foster father! What if something bad happens to him!? It would be all my fault." Rhodey sighs and leans against Tony.

"It wouldn't be your fault, Tony," he says, cutting off the man as he begins to protest. "You don't know what's going on in his home life. Maybe you should just ask him? It wouldn't hurt." Tony sends a crude look to Rhodey.

"What am I supposed to say? 'Hey kid, you look like you're being starved and abused. You okay?' I can't do that, Rhodey!" Tony spits out. "I--"

Tony's cut off by the lab door opening. Turning to look at who's in his lab, he stops short at the frozen curly-haired boy that he was literally just talking about. Peter's wide brown eyes ~~shadowed by the bruises beneath his eyes~~ are on Rhodey. He blinks. Tony blinks. Rhodey blinks. The staring contest is broken when Rhodey stands up, sends a quick glance to Tony, and walks towards Peter. Peter scrambles back slightly as the man approaches him.

Rhodey smiles at Peter in what he hopes to be a calming way. "Hey, you must be Peter. Tony's talked a lot about you." If it's even possible, the kid's eyes widen even more with a sound resembling a strangled squeak escaping him.

"Y-y-you're C-Colonel Rh-Rhodes! W-War Mach-chine! Or-or do y-you pref-prefer I-Iron P-Patr-Patriot?" The kid's voice is croaky and airy and quiet like he hasn't spoken in a while. Spending a worried glance to Tony, the man wonders, are his worries not just paranoia? Looking back at the kid--Peter, Rhodey corrects himself--he once again smiles.

"Rhodey's fine, kid."

"O-Ok-kay, Mr. Rhodey!"

Rhodey sends a perked eyebrow to a shrugging ~~and slightly shocked and worried-looking~~ Tony. Tony looks over at Peter, "Hey, kiddo! Where have you been all week? The lab's been lonely without you." Nodding to Tony, Rhodey takes his leave. He'll be back later to go over somethings about the Accords and his leg braces.

Peter's face manages to pale and flush at the same time. Tony just raises an eyebrow at him and beckons the exhausted-looking kid over to him. Peter scrambles to drop his backpack and make it over to Tony. The man frowns as he scrutinizes the boy. He looks like he's barely been sleeping the past week by the size and color those eye-bags are. He also looks like he hasn't been eating. Yeah, something's definitely been going on.

"I-I-I've b-been grou-ounded," Peter murmurs, toeing the tiled flooring. Tony's eyes soften and his frown deepens.

"Oh, I'm sorry, kid. I didn't mean to get you in trouble. I thought that if I talked to him he wouldn't have grounded you," Tony says. Peter, who's still looking at the floor, shrugs.

"I-It's ok-okay, s-sir," Peter says.

"Hey, what have I said about calling me 'sir'?" Tony asks, hoping to lighten up the room. It only seems to do the opposite as the kid shrinks in on himself and begins to tremble, wide eyes meeting Tony's.

"I-I'm s-sorry!" he says, voice cracking. "I-I did-didn't m-mean, too!"

"Hey, it's okay!" Tony says, hoping his voice is soothing enough. He didn't mean to scare the kid or anything and he's mentally kicking himself. "That's fine. Just try to call me Tony, okay?" Peter snuffles slightly and Tony's eyes widen. "Hey, what's wrong, Pete?" His voice is soft as he speaks.

"N-Nothing-g," Peter says. "C-Can we w-ork, now?" Deciding to bring it up later, Tony nods his head. Peter, looking relieved, slinks over to his desk. He takes the discarded tablet and begins to work on his coding. After a few moments of worry-filled staring, Tony begins to work on his own things. The lab's actually silent today and Tony can hear every time the kid's stylus taps on the tablet or snuffles.

It occurs to Tony, about two hours later, that he hasn't heard the tapping of the stylus in a while. He looks up from his projects and stills as he sees Peter conked out on the desk, stylus still in hand and glasses askew. Tony's heart clenches slightly at the cute display though he worries about the kid's back and neck. He's slept enough on the workbench to know how painful it gets when you wake up. Tony determines whether or not he should wake up the kid but the kid moving makes up his decision.

"No..." he mutters, voice sounding stricken. "No, *please!*" Tony jumps up at the yell. "May, Ben! *Please!*" Tony curses under breath and jumps out of his seat, approaching the kid. His hands hover over Peter, afraid of scaring the kid. He knows what it's like to wake up to a nightmare with someone touching you and thinking that it's still happening. ~~Like his head being held underwater and not being able to breathe and being afraid that the battery in his chest will short-circuit and send shrapnel straight into his heart...~~

Tony shakes off the thoughts. He can't dwell in them when the kid's having a nightmare. He wonders if that's why the kid looks so tired. "Hey!" Tony says loudly. "Peter! Pete, kid, it's okay. It's just a nightmare." His words don't awaken the kid and Peter trembles, tears bleeding out of his eyes. Not thinking, Tony rushes forward and curls his arms around the kid. He expected the kid to struggle a little, maybe even calm down, but what he wasn't expecting was the kid to flinch back so hard that Tony gets thrown halfway across the room.

Tony groans from where he landed on the floor before looking up at the kid. He's still struggling. "No! Don't take me away-! MAY! BEN!" It now dawns on Tony what the nightmare's about. Didn't the kid's aunt and uncle die around this time a year ago? Despite his better judgment, Tony gets back on his feet and rushes towards the kid. This time, when he wraps his arms around the kid, he's not thrown back. Instead, the kid just sobs. Way out of his depth, Tony just holds the sobbing kid in his arms, heart aching and face stricken.

Tony startles as the doors are slammed open and Rhodey runs in, eyes wild with worry. He immediately spots the two huddled on the floor. Friday no doubt contacted the only Avenger in

the Tower that Tony may have been in trouble, as per her programming. Tony's sure that Rhodey didn't expect to find the two of them on the ground and Tony with his arms full of a sobbing half-awake and trembling child.

"Is he hurt?" Rhodey asks, rushing towards them. Tony shakes his head. "Are *you* hurt?"

Tony winces slightly as he shakes his head. "No, I'm fine. The kid fell asleep and I think he had a nightmare." Rhodey narrows his eyes at the wince but doesn't comment. Tony looks down at Peter. "Pete? Are you awake, buddy?" Peter shakes in the man's hold, hands covering his face. He does nod, though, so he's probably just scared, tired, and embarrassed. "You wanna head up to the penthouse to get something to eat?" After a few seconds of contemplation, Peter nods. Tony somehow manages to stand them both up and wraps his arm around Peter who's rubbing his wet eyes and snotty nose on his hoodie. Peter wraps his arms around Tony's back and no doubt feels the flinch and quickly pulls away, looking at Tony with red-rimmed worry-filled eyes.

"A-Are y-you ok-okay?" Peter rasps out, eyebrows furrowed. Tony puts on what he hopes is a convincing smile. Peter's frown tells Tony that it was either not convincing or the kid's remembering how he threw him halfway across the room. Now that he's thinking about it, how did the kid manage to do that? He's like a hundred pounds... Peter's lip wobbles, pulling Tony out of his thoughts. "I-I h-h-hurt you, d-didn't, I?"

"You didn't mean to," Tony says in a soothing voice as they step out of the elevator. He doesn't even remember when they entered it or when Rhodey left. "I should have known better to not touch you while you were having a nightmare." Peter frowns and it looks like tears are filling his eyes again. He pulls away from Tony and Tony doesn't try to pull him back into his side because he knows how the kid reacts when someone reaches out to them.

"I-I *hurt* you!" Peter says, stepping away from Tony and curling against the wall. Tears drip down his cheeks and Tony's sure he can hear his heart breaking. As he goes to approach him, Peter holds his hands up. "I-I'm *sorry*! I-I d-d-didn't *mean* to!" His breathing has accelerated and Tony can see the panicked way that the kid's eyes flicker around, probably looking for a way of escape.

"Hey, hey, hey, Peter. No one's going to hurt you. I'm not going to hurt you," Tony says, holding his hands out placatingly. Peter seems to calm down slightly at that but still seems a little scared. It reminds Tony of the reason as to why he doesn't want kids. He doesn't want to see them so afraid of him like he was with his own dad. It breaks his heart to see Peter looking at him like that. "Okay, good. You want something to eat or drink, kiddo?"

Peter nods hesitantly and Tony gestures for the couch while he heads into the kitchen. He may not be the best cook, but grilled cheese isn't that hard. Right? In the end, Tony manages to make four decent grilled cheeses. He takes the most burnt one for himself, leaving the last three for Peter. He also grabs two glasses of water and hands Peter his stuff. His eyes soften as he sees the kid curled up in a little ball, the sleeves to his hoodie hanging over his hands. There are tears and snot stains and Tony grabs a hoodie from his own closet for the kid. He doesn't need that old MIT hoodie, anyway.

Friday's playing a *Star Wars* movie when Tony gets back, continuing from where the two left off last week. Peter sends Tony a confused look as the man holds out the red hoodie. Tony rolls his eyes slightly, "Take the hoodie, kid. Yours has snot on it." Peter's face flushes a deep red color and he takes the hoodie from Tony slowly, as if the man would take it away from him with a mocking comment. It makes Tony's eyes flash in anger. What the hell has this kid been through?

Peter changes into the hoodie quickly and Tony thinks he catches a glance of green and yellow skin of fading bruises. He doesn't say anything though he does tighten his hold on his glass of

water, suddenly wanting it to be something much stronger. But Tony hasn't had any alcohol since last year and he's not about to break his one-year sober streak.

The two are silent as they munch through their food. Halfway through a fighting scene, Tony asks casually, "So, what was all of that about?" Peter stiffens out of the corner of his eye but Tony doesn't turn to face him. Peter's fiddling with the sleeves of the man's hoodie and Tony has to hide a smile. The kid looks adorable in it. And the MIT logo suits him. After a few moments of silence, Tony turns his gaze to Peter, expression open.

Peter glances up at him before looking down at his covered hands. "I-I'm sorry I f-fell as-asleep," Peter whispers. Tony doesn't show it but he's just noticed that the kid's stuttering much more than the week before. It makes him hate his foster father. Tony just shakes his head, telling him it's okay. "Uh, um, I-uh, I h-had a n-nightm-mare?" The kid's lip wobbles again and Tony places his arm behind the kid on the couch, lending silent comfort. Peter looks up at Tony with shiny brown eyes. "I-It w-w-was... I-It w-was o-of m-my aunt and, um, uncle. They-They di-died t-today l-l-last y-year. I-In my-my arms. They, were, uh, sh-shot. Th-Their blood was all over my h-hands and th-they died and i-it's all my fault, Mr. Stark."

"It's not your fault, Peter," Tony says earnestly, voice soft as he looks at the kid. At least this explains the reason why the kid startles at really loud sounds.

"B-But I saw the robber! I c-could have st-stopped him-!"

"It wasn't your fault," Tony cuts Peter off sternly. "You didn't know."

"But I saw him," Peter implores. "I-I had a f-fight with them a-and ran away. Th-they went out l-looking for me a-and I saw the-the guy stealing at the s-store. I, I didn't stop him, Mr. Stark. A-And then h-he... I heard th-the gunshots a-and I *knew* it w-was them. I heard M-May scream a-and then I-I saw the guy run and B-Ben and M-M-May were on the gr-ground. *And there was so much blood!*"

"Peter," the stern use of his first name makes the kid look up. "It was not your fault. I don't care what you say but you didn't know. It's not your fault, okay?" Peter snuffles again but thankfully *doesn't* start blaming himself ~~or get snot all over Tony's sweater~~. "Is that why you've been out all last week?" Peter seems to tense before he sags in relief, nodding his head. Tony mentally perks an eyebrow at that but Peter's grief stops him from doing so. "Oh, kiddo..."

Peter looks up at Tony. "Can... C-Can I h-ave a, um, hug?" Tony freezes slightly and Peter looks stricken.

"Uh, sure, kiddo," Tony says, voice tight. It's been a while since he's received a hug, let alone gave one. Peter's face brightens slightly and he cuddles into Tony's side. Tony doesn't know what to do. Should he just leave his arms where they are, one on the armrest and the other on the back of the couch, or should he move them? Shit, what should he do? His mind seems to make it's, well, mind up and Tony's arms curl around the boy. Peter lets out a breath that sounds like a sob into Tony's chest. Tony's arms instinctively tighten around the kid.

Eventually, the sobs turn into soft breaths and Tony takes a moment to try and remember when he started running his fingers through the kid's hair. He stops doing it and goes to move his hand away from the kid's hair, but as he does so, the kid whines slightly. Tony immediately starts moving his hand again and lets out a sigh of relief when the kid doesn't wake up. It looks like he needs the rest.

The *Star Wars* movie is still playing softly and Tony's guessing that Friday turned the volume

down since he doesn't remember it happening. Tony wonders if the two of them are ever going to be able to finish the movie series. What with Peter falling asleep and him freaking out about getting home on time last time--

Wait. Shit. What time is it?

Tony goes to pull his phone out of his pocket before realizing that it's on the workbench in the lab. He sighs and looks up to the ceiling. "Hey, Fri, what time is it?"

"It is nearing seven-forty. I believe this is the time for Mr. Parker's normal departure."

"Thanks, Fri, you're a star," Tony says before looking down at Peter. He doesn't really want to wake him up. He seems really comfortable and like he needs a nap. But then Tony remembers the boy's reaction to being late last time and knows that he'll have to wake him up. Maybe a few more minutes...? Nope. I have to wake him up.

Tony sighs and looks down at the kid. "Hey. Pete. Buddy, you gotta wake up." Peter hums and burrows into Tony's side and it makes Tony's heart swell at the cuteness of it, not that he would admit it. Tony moves the kid's head a little bit. "Peter!" he says, a little louder than at regular volume. "You gotta wake up or you're going to be late!"

"No," Peter groans into Tony's side. "I don't want to, Uncle Ben." And now Tony's heart is broken. Brilliant, kid. Do you have to have that effect on people?

"Pete!" Tony yells. This time, it has the wanted effect and Peter immediately jumps up with a yelp before hissing and grabbing his stomach. Tony's eyes furrow and he looks at the slightly pained expression on Peter's face before the boy schools it. It seems that something not right is still going on, then. "Hey, kiddo. You gotta go home now."

Peter pouts and it rivals the cuteness of Peter's sleepy burrowing into his side. Jeez, when did he become a dad? Shaking off his thoughts, Tony looks at the kid. "Uh uh, no pouting. You remember what happened the last time you were late, right?" And that was, once again, the wrong thing to say. Peter stiffens and his eyes widen, fear flashing across the kid's now blown pupils. "Shi-fu-crap, kid, sorry. You're not late, we still got a few minutes before you gotta leave. I just thought you'd like to grab your stuff."

Peter nods shakily, once again semi-composing himself. "Y-Yeah, okay. Th-thank you, Mr. Stark." Tony grins, glad that the 'sir' business is once again gone. He'll get the kid to call him ~~dad~~ Tony one day soon, though. They make their way to the lab for Peter to pick up his homework and backpack before Tony makes a comment about Peter taking the StarkPad. "What?" Peter sputters. "N-No! I can't take it. I-It's too expensive!" One deadpan look from Tony and they're making their way to the garage with the tablet placed in Peter's bag.

"Y-You're driving me?" Peter asks, stopping in front of the Audi they took last time. Tony spins around to him and lifts an eyebrow.

"Yep! I gave Happy the day off since I didn't know if you were gonna show up today." Peter slumps down, obviously guilty. "Don't worry about it," Tony says, easily spotting the movement. "He was due for a break today, anyway." Peter seems suspicious but climbs into the front seat, buckling his seatbelt.

Tony gets the same feeling he did the last time he dropped Peter off but he still says goodbye and leaves, this time without walking the kid up. The kid was ten minutes early, thankfully, so he shouldn't be punished.

Rhodey's waiting for him when he gets back to the Tower. "What's up, sour patch?" Tony asks, grabbing himself a mug of coffee to Rhodey's disapproving look. It's never too late for coffee.

Rhodey's expression turns worried as he sits at the counter across from where Tony's standing. "Is the kid--Peter?--alright?" Tony's eyebrows perk up. He didn't expect Rhodey to be worried about the kid, more so about his coffee habits, rather. "What? It's not every day that a kid falls asleep at work, has a nightmare, ends up knocking their boss on their ass, and then cries themselves to sleep in their boss's arms." Tony's face *definitely* doesn't heat up.

"Oh. You saw that."

"Yes, I saw that!" Rhodey says. "Are you sure you're fine? That was a pretty hard hit. How the hell did the kid manage to knock you on your ass, by the way? Isn't he, like, a hundred pounds?"

"No idea, Rhodey," Tony comments, sipping at his coffee. "And I'm fine. Probably a little bruising. I've felt worse after falling asleep at the workbench." Rhodey scrutinizes Tony for a moment before nodding his head, accepting Tony's statement. The man's face softens.

"Is the kid alright? It looked like a bad nightmare if he had that kind of reaction." Rhodey's worry is not too much of a surprise. The man is known to get attached pretty quickly ~~though the same could be said about Tony with the way he's only known Peter for, like, two weeks and let's not forget how he barely knew most of the Avengers when he started making them their own floors in the Tower and what about Harley? He gave the kid a very expensive workshop makeover and may or may not email him on occasion.~~

"Honestly?" Tony asks. "I don't think so. The kid's aunt and uncle died in front of them. Shot. He heard it and saw them both bleeding out. It happened today one year ago. They were his only family left, he's in foster care now." Rhodey's sharp intake of breath is enough to tell that that's a surprise. The man probably thought it was some kiddie nightmare with the bogey monster or something, not the kid covered in his only family members' blood.

"Damn," Rhodey whistles. "The kid lost all of his family?"

Tony nods, and then mutters, "I guess he's like me in that aspect." Tony can feel the man's glare. He doesn't need to look up from his coffee to know he's glaring at him.

"Tony, you have family," Rhodey says kindly, surprising Tony enough to make him look up at his friend. "I'm your family, Pepper's your family, Happy's your family. The Rogues are your family." ~~Peter's your family.~~ Tony glares at the man.

"*Were* my family," he says firmly. "They're not my family anymore, Rhodey."

"If they're not your family then why did you interrupt the security footage on the Raft so Rogers could get everyone out?" Tony breathes in sharply. He hadn't known that Rhodey knew that he was the one to wipe the cameras. He thought that everyone thought that Romanoff did it. It's no secret that the redheaded Russian is a tech-genius. Her knowledge of tech can rival his at any given point in time if they're talking about certain things ~~like the widow's bites that he's still definitely not making for the woman.~~

"You know about that?" Tony asks. Rhodey scoffs.

"Course I did, Tones. Just because we all fought doesn't mean that you care less about them," Rhodey says softly. The man's on thin ice. It may have been nearly a year since the events of the 'Avengers Civil War' as the media has taken to call it, but that doesn't mean the wounds have

healed completely. To Tony, they're red and puffy scars, still tender to the touch. And right now, it kind of feels like Rhodey's jabbing those scars.

"Well," Rhodey says, standing. "It may be early but you need to get some sleep. I'll come down to the lab tomorrow for you to check out my braces. Goodnight, Tony."

"Night," Tony says. And then he's in silence. It seems that everyone's having heart-to-hearts today and Tony can't get away from it.

Yippee.

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

Warning: Graphic abuse and cruel language. Don't read if you're uncomfortable with sexual language and triggering for sexual assault.

Sorry that it's so short! Also, if any of you are interested in a mostly correct timeline of the MCU and the ages of all characters, I've written and posted a work for it! Here: <https://archiveofourown.org/works/21055100/chapters/50084816>

Peter winces as the hinges on the door squeals, no doubt alerting Dr. Malek that Peter's home. At least he's around ten minutes early instead of ten minutes late. He doesn't think he'll be able to survive another beating.

"You're home early." Peter winces at Dr. Malek's statement. "Get over here, boy." Peter immediately skitters over to Dr. Malek, afraid of doing something wrong and potentially getting punished. He stops a few feet away from where the man's sitting eating dinner, not looking the man in the eyes. "What did you say to Stark?"

Peter blinks at the way the man bites out the words. Peter stutters out, "I-I tol-told him th-that, um, I was gr-grounded." The man hums and Peter continues standing there, not daring to look the man in his eyes.

Then, "What are you wearing!?" Peter flinches at the hissed words, looking down at the sweatshirt. His eyes widen. He forgot that Mr. Stark gave him the sweatshirt since he got tears and snot on his old one. Peter must have been quiet too long because the man stands and towers over the boy, asking, "Where did you get that sweatshirt!? Answer me, boy!"

Peter trembles slightly underneath the man's blazing gaze, careful as he stumbles over his words, hands fiddling with the maroon shirt's sleeves. "O-Oh, um, Mr. St-Stark g-gave it to m-me? I, uh, g-got o-oil on my o-other one?" The lie falls from his lips easily and Peter can practically see his aunt and uncle rolling around in their graves. They didn't raise their nephew to be a liar, but here he is. Lying to his foster father. But it's for a good reason! he mentally reasons with them. He'll hurt me otherwise!

Dr. Malek is quiet for a moment and then Peter's spidey sense burns at the back of his neck, his cheek flaring in pain a second later. He doesn't get a second to react before the man's hand is roughly grabbing the front of ~~his~~ Mr. Stark's sweatshirt, his head instinctively rearing back as his eyes meet cold blue ones. They're filled with fury.

"He gave it to you?" The words are calm and quiet, practically whispered. Peter shakily nods his head. "And why would he give you one of his sweatshirts, Peter? You're just an intern." Peter's face pales.

"I-I t-told you, s-sir," Peter says nervously. "I-I ha-had, um, o-oil on m-mine. I g-guess he-he didn't w-want me to, um, get c-cold?" Peter winces. That didn't sound like a valid lie.

"He didn't want you to get cold?" Dr. Malek deadpans in the same calm and quiet tone. "He didn't

want you to get cold?" he repeats. "And why would he care if you get cold, boy? You're nothing, just a shitty little intern who probably just fetches him coffee." The man's voice turns to malice as he snarls. "Or does the man want to stake his claim on you? He wants you all to himself, doesn't he? You still servicing him boy?" Peter shakes his head wildly, shaking as the man's hold tightens on the sweatshirt. "I bet you are. You know what, Petey? You're not going to that internship anymore. You're getting too close to Stark. You'll probably tell him something that we don't want him to know, won't you? We can't let that happen, Petey. Or have you already told him? I bet you have! You're not allowed to go anywhere after school anymore. Once the bell rings, you come right home. Do you understand me? *Do you understand me!?*"

Peter nods his head quickly, wishing the man will let go of him. "I-I-I un-understand, s-s-sir!" he chokes out. "I-I'll c-come st-straight h-home! I-I p-pr-promise!" The man's quiet, craze-filled eyes staring into Peter's fear-filled ones.

"Good," the man says, dropping Peter's shirt. "Now go to your room!" Peter flinches and jumps back at the bark. He immediately skitters his way to his room, heart beating out of his chest in fear. He slams the door closes and holds his breath, awaiting the man's angry shouts. When nothing happens, he sags against the door, eyes burning from exhaustion, his cry session earlier, and the tears brimming in his eyes. Nausea turns in his stomach at the nickname the man had said and the fact that he keeps assuming that the boy is doing *that* with Mr. Stark. Petey is a nickname that Skip used. He doesn't like that one anymore.

He clamps a hand over his mouth as a sob tries to breakthrough. He's not allowed to go to the internship anymore. He won't be able to see Mr. Stark anymore, the man that was beginning to fill the aunt and uncle and parents sized hole in his heart. Peter's backpack thuds on the floor and he locks the door before heading to his bathroom, locking that door, too.

He doesn't think as he turns the water to its hottest setting, shedding his clothes and curling up under the spray. It's only then does he allow the rest of the tears to fall and the sobs to escape his chest. He misses the Italian lullabies that his mom sang him, the way his dad ~~who was never really his dad~~ used to guide him in creating his first circuit board, the way his aunt used to teach him Italian since his mom had been unable to, and the way uncle Ben used to crack dad jokes and talk science with Peter. The man may not have been educated in science, but he read things, particularly things about Tony Stark aka Iron Man. That's where Peter began his hero-worship Tony Stark. He had been a fan of the man way before Iron Man and now he won't be able to see his hero again.

He sits in the hot water for a long time before pulling himself off the floor and cleaning his face and hair and body. He absentmindedly pulls the MIT sweatshirt back on and a pair of Ben's old Iron Man pajama pants that hang over his feet. He curls up under his comforter, ignoring the homework he forgot to do and ignoring the fact that he'll have to talk to Dr. Malek tomorrow.

Peter wakes up from nightmares of five different occasions throughout the night. He dreamed of crashing planes and gunshots and screams and fire and warehouses and Skip and even some of Mr. Stark dying in the place of his aunt and uncle. Peter wakes up retching to that one. He can't imagine the man dead. He's his hero, someone he looks up to. ~~He's someone that cares about Peter and acted as a dad to him.~~

He had ended up turning off his alarm and laid down in bed, trying to ignore the thoughts of his unfinished homework and the death of his aunt and uncle and not being able to work in the lab with Mr. Stark again despite how nervous he was around his hero.

By the time his alarm is supposed to go off, Peter's already getting dressed. He pulls on a pun shirt

that was his uncle's and he pulls that MIT sweatshirt back on because it smells like Mr. Stark's cologne and the lab. His socks are mismatched and his blue jeans have holes in them and so do his converse but he honestly doesn't care.

He pulls his backpack on, dead on his feet, and leaves the apartment. Peter distantly wonders where Dr. Malek is since he doesn't remember him leaving and he didn't see him, but he shoves away the thought. He doesn't want to think of the man.

Peter meets up with Ned and steals his homework during lunch to copy off of. He shrugs off his friends' worried looks and questions since he knows that he looks like shit and he's not talking but he doesn't care. He's tired and he misses May and Ben. He misses the way she always knew when he was sick or down and would let him stay home from school and would shove ginger ale down his throat since that's the only thing he could stomach while sick. He misses the way Ben would joke about Peter being the genius in the family or the way he would know if Flash was picking on him.

It's a few days later when Peter finds the tablet. He had forgotten that Mr. Stark made him take it with him. He had missed a lab day yesterday so it's now Thursday. Turning on the tablet, Peter decides that he may as well work on some coding to get his mind off of things. It's not like he can return the tablet to Mr. Stark and the man had given it to him to finish work, so while he can't be in the lab in person he might as well work on some coding. Plus, Dr. Malek's still at work though should be back in an hour or so, so he doesn't worry about locking the door as he works. ~~It would have been a good idea to lock the door.~~

About an hour or so into working on his coding, a little message icon lights up on the side of the screen. Hesitantly tapping on it, the message pops up.

Tony Stark: Hey, kid. You didn't come to the lab yesterday. What happened?

Peter freezes. Mr. Stark messaged him. He can't exactly let the man know that he's not allowed back because his foster father is abusing him and thinks that Peter may tell the man that he's being abused. So, he does the only thing he can. He replies.

Me: Sorry, Mr. Stark. I got sick and Dr. Malek didn't want me going to the internship. Is it okay if I code at home for a few days? I can find a way to return the tablet if you want me to.

Tony Stark: Keep it. Sorry you got sick, kiddo. Is it because of Monday?

Peter swallows thickly, remembering what happened on Monday, during and after the internship. He replies.

Me: Yeah.

Tony Stark: Feel better, kid.

Peter blinks. So he doesn't want to talk about it? Peter's fine with that ~~though he secretly wishes that the man would ask him because Peter's so close to saying something about Dr. Malek if only Mr. Stark asked.~~

Me: Thanks.

Peter goes back to coding and jumps as the front door is opened and slammed closed. The man must have had a bad day today. Peter's frozen in his bed as Dr. Malek stomps around the apartment and his heart races as the man stomps past his room to go to his own bedroom. He's already moving to hide the tablet when his bedroom door is slammed open but Dr. Malek spots it

before Peter can fully hide it under his pillow.

"What's that?" he asks, tone angry as he stomps up to Peter. The man rips the tablet out of Peter's hands and the boy freezes, face paling. "Did you steal this?" Peter shakes his head wildly.

"N-No! I-I-I didn't t-take it," Peter says, stuttering as the man looks down at the screen. Peter suddenly remembers that the messages are still on the screen and he instinctively reaches to pull it out of Dr. Malek's hands. But the man has already seen them.

"You're talking to Stark!?" he roars down at Peter, tossing the tablet to the side. It thuds against the wall and falls without a scratch. Dr. Malek rushes forward and pulls Peter from his bed by the MIT hoodie he's still wearing, throwing a fist into the boy's face. Peter cries out as the man throws him on the floor and begins kicking him in his just recently healed ribs and stomach.

"How *dare* you!? I told you not to speak to him! And what do you do? You steal a tablet and talk to the man in secret! How much does he know? Huh!? Does he know that you're a little whore begging for attention? Does he know that you're such a worthless little shit that you need to be taught lessons every day? Huh!? Tell me! *Tell me!*"

Peter cries out sharply in pain as the man's foot connects with his ribs, a distinct crack following the white-hot pain. "P-Please!" Peter yowls. "H-He doesn't kn-know any-anything! *Please!*"

"Shut up!" the man roars, continuing to kick the boy. Peter curls up in a ball in an attempt to protect himself but the damage is already done. At least three ribs are broken and the rest fractured. He coughs sharply in pain and can feel something wet on his lips that tasted too much like iron to be anything other than blood. "You don't deserve mercy! I bet you've told him everything you little shit! Are you so much as a little whore that you'd go behind my back and talk to *Stark* of all people!?" The man spits out Mr. Stark's name and if he wasn't being beaten up and if he was in his Spider-Man suit he would say something about it.

But he's not. He's curled up in a ball with broken ribs and blood covering his lips and tongue, crying in pain.

"It hurts! Stop! *Stop!* Please, *please!*" Peter sobs, not even bothering to muffle his cries and yells of pain. Peter's vision starts to become black on the edges and he whines out in pain, head pounding as the man lands a solid blow to his hand-covered hand. His vision blacks out slightly as some of his fingers break. He cries out in pain again and flinches as the sound of wood splintering rings behind Dr. Malek's yells and his cries.

"I would stop that if I were you," a distinctively familiar slightly tech-sounding voice says. A second later the blows stop and a yell of pain rings out. Peter can hear the sounds of a very short scuffle and he peels his eyes open to see a red and gold suit. His eyes meet the mask and his vision blackouts.

Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

Sorry that it took so long! This chapter was kinda hard to write and I had to rewrite it like three different times and I'm still not really satisfied with it. It's a little too short and nothing really happens so I'll try to get a follow-up done quickly!

Tony paces back and forth as he clutches at his hair. The kid's in surgery. Something about a broken rib and a punctured lung. He didn't really listen. All he could see was the kid covered in blood from a head wound and the way he was crumpled up on the floor. "Shit," he hisses quietly to himself as his lungs seize, causing him to choke.

"Tony?" someone says. "Tony!?" Tony continues to choke on hair as he tries to inhale. He can't breathe. *He can't breathe.* He flinches as someone grabs his shoulders but they don't lessen their grip on him. "Tony," the voice is calmer now, "You're having a panic attack. You have to breathe, okay? Breathe."

The person grabs his hand and places it on their chest as they take in exaggerated breaths. Tony tries to match his breaths to the person's but his thoughts keep turning to the sharp words the kid's foster father spat at him and the way the kid was balled up on the ground, arms wrapped around him in a pathetic attempt to protect himself from the blows.

~~The image morphs to a little kid huddled on the ground as his father shouts drunken slurs at him, telling him what a worthless little shit he is. The blows the man threw at him, the way he flinches at each yell, the quiet sobs that he shook with as he hid in his closet, a hand covering his mouth to make sure the man couldn't find him...~~

The person's hand wipes at his face and Tony realizes distantly that he's crying. "Tony!" the stern shout makes him flinch backward but it doesn't sound like Howard ~~and Howard's dead, isn't he? He is. Tony can still see the way Cap's friend strangled his mother and bashed his father's head in.~~ *This isn't helping.* "Tony, you're okay, you're safe. No one's going to hurt you. Tony, listen to me, you have to breathe, okay? Just breathe." ~~But he still can't breathe because if he breathes he'll hear him.~~

"*Breathe.*" Tony's chest rattles as he inhales at the command, breath choppy and shaky. Tony breathes again and again and his chest slowly matches the lift and fall of the one under his hand. "Breathe." This time the word is soft and calm. Tony breathes. His vision clears and the person kneeling in front of him is Rhodey. Wait, when did they end up on the floor?

"What?" Tony chokes out, voice thick with the tears that were running down his face. He lifts a hand and wipes them off his face, looking around him in confusion. They're in the hall in front of the medbay.

"You had a panic attack," Rhodey informs him, and before Tony's thoughts can wander, he asks, "What's wrong? Is Pepper okay? What's happening, Tones?"

"The kid," Tony says. Rhodey's face morphs into confusion. "Peter, he--Oh, God, Rhodey. He--He was on th-the ground and his foster father was-was *hitting* him. And, oh, my God, *it's all my*

fault." Tony goes to clutch at his hair again before Rhodey's hands stop him.

"Tony, breathe. It's not your fault. What happened?"

"I was working in the lab and Friday told me that the StarkPad I gave Pete was picking up something shady so I had Friday play it, and oh, my God, *Rhodey*. You should have heard all the things the kid's foster father was saying and he was hitting him and I got there as fast as I could in my suit but he was already unconscious when I got there."

"You heard the kid's foster father beating him up?" Rhodey asks, voice steely. Tony nods and Rhodey's face softens. Rhodey is one of the only people who knows that Tony was more or less abused by his father. And to see someone Tony cares about getting hurt in the same way? There's no doubt as to why Tony's freaking out. "Where's the guy now?"

"I had Friday call the cops and send them the audio," Tony says. "Told them to come to the Tower in a few days to check up with the kid and get a statement." Rhodey nods.

"Why don't we go sit down?" Rhodey suggests. They're still kneeling on the floor, and let's face it, both men aren't getting any younger. Tony nods and stands, offering a hand to his friend. Rhodey rolls his eyes but takes it. His legs are stronger than Tony's with the leg braces he has. He doesn't need help standing.

Rhodey guides them over to the chairs that are leaning against the wall. "It's my fault," Tony says after a few minutes of silence.

"It's not your fault," Rhodey counters, narrowing his eyes at his friend.

"Of course it is!" Tony says loudly. "I knew something was up! With the way he was acting around me, the way he kept flinching, was quiet, always shrunken in on himself! And not to mention that I caught a few bruises on his arms and ribs. I should have known! And what about the whole week absence!? He was beaten up while he was grounded. *Oh, God*. Rhodey, what if he was hurt and that's why he didn't come to the internship?"

"Tony, calm down," Rhodey says, stopping the man before he can spiral down into another panic attack. "We can't know for sure that's why he couldn't come. You said his aunt and uncle died, right? Maybe he needed some time off? Okay? We'll just have to ask him about it when he wakes up." Tony nods though he knows that the kid didn't just need some time off. He had been gone the week before and he hadn't come yesterday or anything and he didn't use the StarkPad until today, either.

They sit there for who knows how long. Pepper had stopped by for a little bit to hug Tony and to ask about Peter. She hadn't met the boy yet but Tony's been more or less talking about him ever since he started the internship so it's close enough. It's only when Tony's alone does he hear anything about the kid.

"Mr. Stark?" Helen's voice immediately grabs Tony's attention. "Peter's out of surgery." Tony seems to deflate in his seat. "There are things that I would like to speak with you about, however." And he's tense again. Swallowing nervously, Tony stands from the chair with cold coffee in hand. Helen brings them over to an empty examination room.

"What's wrong with the kid?" Tony asks immediately as soon as their out of earshot of everyone else.

"Nothings wrong, actually," Helen starts off. "He'll be perfectly healed up in a few weeks. He's

got a concussion and his lung did collapse, but he's stable now. Some of his fingers were broken, along with a few ribs, and there was some serious bruising to his chest, arms, and stomach, but I don't see any serious issues stemming from those."

Tony's eyebrows scrunch up in confusion. "What did you want to talk about, then?"

"He's enhanced."

Tony would have definitely done a spit take if he was drinking something. "What?"

"Well, it appears that some of the superficial head wounds were actually healing when we were dealing with the punctured lung, but when we went back to clean them, they were nearly completely healed. There's also the fact that he nearly woke up in the middle of the surgery. He's got a really fast metabolism and healing. I'd say it's better than Cap's!"

Tony blinks slowly as he takes in the information, some things slowly clicking into place. "... You're telling me that this fifteen-year-old kid is enhanced?" Helen nods with an intrigued smile.

"It would appear so! I'm really interested in how fast his healing and metabolism is exactly since there were some already healing bruises on him and not to mention the fact that he's as skinny as a rail but still somehow has abs." Tony's heart sinks into his stomach. So the kid *was* getting beat up for the past few weeks at least, then. It would make sense with the flinching.

"How old do you think those bruises are?" Tony asks, voice deadly serious. Helen startles slightly at Tony's turn of voice before answering with a hum.

"I don't really know, but the darker ones seem to have been caused about a week or two ago. I'm not completely sure how long with his healing, though, so that's my best estimate. I'll be able to conduct a better time frame based on how well he heals from the wounds he has now. We'll also have to estimate with his metabolism. I had to give him some of Cap's stuff but it seems that he's burning through it a little quicker than we thought it would, so he'll be waking up within an hour to a day. Can't be too exact, unfortunately."

Tony nods slowly, taking in all of the information and filing it away for later. That kid's really got some explaining to do, but they'll go over everything after he's awake and somewhat healthy. He doesn't want to overwhelm him. "Thanks, Helen," he tells the woman genuinely. "I really appreciate it. Can I go in to see him?"

Helen nods but grabs Tony's arm as he goes to pass her. "Mr. Stark, there's something else." Tony stops and looks over at the woman who suddenly seems nervous, hands clutching her StarkPad as she removes her hand from him. "Since Peter is a new patient, we had to run a variety of tests on him. I had told Friday to run all tests on his blood, but I wasn't aware that when I said 'all tests' that she would run *every* single test the labs here are capable of."

Tony perks an eyebrow. Where is this going? Helen's knuckles are now white with the force she's gripping on the StarkPad. "What are you saying, Dr. Cho?"

"Peter's parents were Doctors Richard and Mary Parker, right?" Tony nods. The names sound familiar, especially Mary's. "Well, Dr. Richard's DNA did not match with Peter's." Tony's once more bathed in confusion.

"And? So you're telling me that Peter's dad wasn't actually his dad? Who's his dad?" Helen grimaces slightly and hands Tony the tablet. He grabs it and looks down at it in confusion, only to freeze. The DNA test is displayed on the screen, Peter's picture next to his and... Tony's next to

the DNA match. "What?" Tony whispers, face going pale. His head whips up towards Helen who looks both uncomfortable and sympathetic. "*I'm his dad!?*"

"The test doesn't lie, Mr. Stark," Helen says. "Friday *was* the one to run it, after all."

"I'm his dad?" Helen nods and Tony blinks, staring back down at the tablet. "Um, wow, okay? So, uh, can-can I see him?" Helen looks a little worried at the way he brushes it off but nods her head, walking him over to Peter's room. Tony freezes slightly in the doorway.

The kid looks so *small*.

The standard hospital blanket looks so big on him and he's just curled up on the bed, a few different wires and tubes hanging off of him. Despite the image of looking like someone who looked like he was on death's door a few hours ago, the kid looks peaceful. His face is relaxed and the last time Tony saw this was when he fell asleep in the lab, right before his nightmare. His curls are wild and slightly matted to his forehead and Tony has this ridiculous urge to run his fingers through them but he resists ~~even as his mind whispers that he's the kid's dad and should be able to do something like that.~~

Tony doesn't realize that he's moved until he grabs Peter's small cold hand in his own. He frowns in worry. Should the kid be this cold? He looks cold. Tony pulls the blanket up more to cover the kid better. His heart stutters at the total dad move but he doesn't care. The kid's hurt and *he* caused it. He *knew* something was going on and he didn't do anything until the kid was literally getting the shit beat out of him.

Tony rubs his thumb slightly over the pink line of where the gash was on his forehead. Helen was right, it's almost completely healed. Peter *does* have advanced healing. That's something that they'll definitely be talking about later but right now Tony's focused on the kid. *His* kid. A kid that he should have known about, should have protected, should have raised. ~~But he's kinda grateful that he didn't raise the kid because he's such a great kid and he wouldn't have grown to be so kind and polite if Tony raised him because he would have been a shitty father.~~

I can't be a dad.

The thought slides through Tony's mind and he strengthens the grip on Peter's hand as he shakes his head. No, he *has* to be a dad. This is his kid, *his* kid. A not-so-little person holding half of his DNA that was hurt because Tony didn't know he existed until he met him. Tony will try his best to be this kid's dad because he would never hurt him, doesn't want to even think about it, and he definitely won't be throwing him back into foster care if *this* is what happens if he's thrown into it.

Hell no. The kid's staying with him, even if he has to fight to Hell and back.

He's not letting him get hurt again.

Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

iT's LaTe AgAiN

Good news is that I will HOPEFULLY have the last chapter up by the first since I'll be writing the sequel for NaNoWriMo. There may be one or two more chapters, I think I'll just have one long one, maybe?

Peter wakes up alone with an annoying beeping sound in his ears. It only takes him a few seconds to remember what happened and to deduce that he's in the Tower medbay. They had to come down here once when Mr. Stark accidentally cut himself while working on something for SI. Peter groans as he pulls himself into a sitting position, his stomach and ribs aching sharply. His throat is sore and he grabs the water on his bedside table with a shaky hand. Just as he's bringing it to his lips, the curtain surrounding his bed is pulled back. Yelping, Peter looks up at a frazzled looking Tony Stark with wide eyes.

Mr. Stark doesn't look so good. There are large bags under his eyes, his hair is messed up, and his eyes are rimmed red. "How are you doing, kid?" Tony asks, rushing to Peter's side and sitting in the chair that was pulled up to his bedside. Peter frowns as he sets down the empty glass of water.

"U-Um," Peter winces as his voice breaks, blushing in embarrassment. "I'm, uh, I-I'm okay, Mr. Stark." Mr. Stark looks over him with appraising eyes and Peter frowns at the man's appearance. "A-Are y-you okay?" Mr. Stark stares at Peter for a second before snorting, laughing hysterically for a second.

"Am I okay?" he asks rhetorically before frowning. "Pete, I'm not the one who just got the sh-crap beat out of them by their foster father." Peter winces and looks down, fiddling with the edge of the hospital blanket. A sigh, and then, "I'm sorry, kid. I didn't mean to bring that up. Well, I did, but not like that. Are you sure you're okay? I know you got some freaky healing but it's only been about half a day since everything--"

Peter's head whips up at the statement and his wide eyes meet Mr. Stark's. "Y-Y-You kn-ow about that!?" Mr. Stark perks an eyebrow.

"It's pretty difficult to hide a cut that healed in about three hours, kid," Mr. Stark says blandly before sitting up straight with a soft expression. "But yeah, I know about that." Peter frowns and looks down at his hands.

"Y-You're n-not m-m-mad?" he asks quietly. Peter doesn't want Mr. Stark to be mad at him because he hid the fact that he's Spider-Man. Wait, does the man even know that he's Spider-Man!?

"Peter, look at me." Peter looks up hesitantly at the stern voice. Mr. Stark's looking at him with a stern and serious expression. It's so unlike Dr. Malek's glare. Instead of cold and full of malice, Mr. Stark's stare is warm and open and stern and worried. It makes Peter feel warm but he's still afraid of what Mr. Stark will think. Peter's seen all of the news about mutants. About all of the slurs and vandalism and hate they get.

“Why would I be mad at you?” Mr. Stark asks, sounding genuinely curious. He continues before Peter can answer. “Is it because you’re enhanced? You think that I’d care that you’ve got enhanced healing? Kid, I’ve met people who can do freakier stuff.”

Peter purses his lips and murmurs, “I-It’s n-not jus-st enhanced h-healing...”

“What?”

Peter winces again, mentally cursing himself for speaking. He doesn’t look up from where he’s messing with his blanket as he begins speaking, “I-I, um... I h-have the-these powers? I can, uh, stick to things? And, uh, I-I’m, like, really really strong? A-And, I, uh, can, um, jump really high? L-Like ten feet? A-And I, uh, can, um, hear y-you’re heartbeat?”

Peter stops talking and there’s a little silence. After a few moments, he looks up. Mr. Stark is staring at him blankly, blinking slowly. Shit, did I break him? “M-Mr. Stark?” Peter asks, looking into the man’s eyes. Mr. Stark closes his eyes and breathes in a deep breath, making Peter grimace. It’s never really good if a parent adult has to reboot.

Peter watches anxiously as Mr. Stark meets his eyes again. “Kid,” he says slowly, voice sounding measured. “Are you telling me that you are that spiderling swinging around Queens?”

“Sp-Spider-Man,” he murmurs, shrugging slightly. Mr. Stark scoffs slightly.

“Not in that onesie, you’re not.” Peter ignores the urge to glare at the man and only succeeds by slightly rolling his eyes. He knows that his suit is complete crap. It’s dirty, and loose on him, and gets caught on everything. Not to mention how shotty his webshooters are. “Why do you do it?”

The question catches Peter off-guard and startles him slightly. “Wh-What?”

“I gotta know, what’s your MO? What makes you get out of that bed in the morning?”

Peter looks down at the blanket, his eyes itching slightly. He thought it was cool when he first got his powers--after the sick for a few days thing, though. He thought about how popular it would make him if he could suddenly be really good at football and track and other sports. He had always had asthma, had never been able to play as well as other kids. There’s also the fact that he loved to do science kits with his Uncle Ben and take apart different things around the house.

“B-Because, uh,” Peter sighs and fiddles with the blanket. “Because I’ve been m-me my whole life. A-And I’ve, um, had these powers for a year. I-I read b-books, I build com-computers. An-And, y-yeah, I would l-love to, um, to play f-football. But I-I couldn’t then, s-so I sh-shouldn’t now.”

Peter shrugs. “Sure,” Mr. Stark sympathizes. “‘Cause you’re different.”

“Yeah!” Peter says, slouching against the bed, glad that someone gets it. Ned’s great and all, but he’s a little too focused on the fact that Peter is Spider-Man. That he beats up bad guys and is super strong. He thinks it would be so cool if Peter shows everyone that he can finally do things. People would like them, him, and they’d be popular. “Exactly, but I can’t tell anybody that s-so I’m not.” Peter looks down at his hands as his throat becomes thick with his grief.

“Wh-When you can do the-the things that I can, but you don’t, and then the bad things happen? Th-They happen b-because of you.” Peter’s vision becomes blurry with tears, his guilt rearing his ugly head around again. He still blames himself for his aunt and uncle’s death. He could have stopped the guy, but he didn’t.

Mr. Stark clears his throat and Peter swiftly wipes his eyes, looking up at him. “So you want to look

out for the little guy. You wanna do your part, make the world a better place.” Peter sighs in relief when the man doesn’t approach the topic of the fact that Peter was obviously talking about his aunt and uncle’s deaths.

“Yeah,” he says. “Yeah, yeah, just looking out for the little guy. That’s what it is.” Peter mentally winces and suddenly remembers the part where he went after Toomes and nearly killed himself, like, three because of the man. Peter acknowledges the fact that he’s not ready for the big guns, yet. “I, uh, I-I’m r-really sorry about your, um, plane Mr. Stark.”

The man startles Peter with a laugh and he looks up at Mr. Stark with slightly wide eyes. “Don’t worry about that, Underoos. You did me a solid there. I would have lost all of my tech and weapons would have fallen into the wrong hands. I’m just glad that I finally get to thank you. That was a very dangerous stunt, though.”

Peter winces. Yeah, he can remember the screeching of metal and the heat of the flames and the sound of Toomes’ wings exploding, not to mention the warehouse. He shuts down those thoughts before he spirals into a panic attack. He’s embarrassed himself in front of his hero long enough.

“I know,” he murmurs. “I really am sorry, Mr. Stark.” Tony scoffs slightly and claps his hand on Peter’s shoulder gently. Peter looks into the man’s eyes.

“Kid, stop apologizing for saving my ass.” Peter’s lip quirks up slightly. “Now, that’s enough superhero stuff for one day. Your doctor will be here in a few minutes to check you over. You’ll probably be stuck in this bed for at least a week until most of the bruising has gone down and then you’ll be up again.”

Peter flinches and looks at Mr. Stark. “I-I’m not going back th-there again!” Mr. Stark grimaces slightly, his hand tightening on Peter’s shoulder.

“Kid, you’ll be staying here with me in the penthouse. I will not let you go back to that apartment. Besides,” Tony says, sounding slightly cheery. “Your foster father’s in jail. Some officers will be here in a day or so to go over everything with you, and your social worker.” Mr. Stark grumbles the last few words. “Don’t worry about her, though, you’ll be staying with me.”

Peter rears back slightly, eyes wide and hands waving around. “M-Mr. Stark! I-It’s okay! I-I don’t need to stay here! I could just, um, go to another house o-or something!” Peter really doesn’t want to go anywhere else, though. He knows that he’s known Mr. Stark for a few weeks but the man is nice to him. He cares about him, feeds him, talks to him.

“Peter, I am not letting you go back to a place that allowed you to get this hurt in the first place,” Mr. Stark says in a no-nonsense tone. It’s a tone that Peter hasn’t heard in a year. It’s a tone that Aunt May used to use all the time. It makes any and all arguments die in his throat. “We’ll do with the foster situation when your social worker comes, so all you have to do is sit here, okay?”

“Mr. Stark?” a feminine voice asks. Peter’s eyes snap over to where an Asian woman stands in a white lab coat. This must be the doctor. She smiles over at Peter before looking over to Mr. Stark. “I need to do a check-up on Mr. Parker over here. You’ll need to step out for a few moments.”

“Yeah, of course,” Mr. Stark says, patting Peter’s shoulder one last time as he stands. “I’ll see you in a few, kiddo.” Mr. Stark and the doctor make eye contact for a second as the man passes through the door. It makes Peter wonder what they’re not telling him. His aunt and uncle used to share looks before telling him something that they kept hidden.

Peter shakes his head. No, Mr. Stark wouldn’t keep something from him. Would he? Maybe it’s

just something about Peter's mutation. The doctor probably knows something about that. "Peter?" Peter looks up at the woman. "Hi, I'm Helen Cho, your doctor. How are you feeling today? You took quite a beating last night."

Peter winces slightly at the reminder but politely answers the doctor. "I-I'm okay, Dr. Cho," he says, ignoring the stabbing in his ribs and the ache on his stomach. He notices how his fingers aren't hurting. They must have healed last night. Everything else is hurting, though, but he doesn't want to inconvenience anybody. The doctor perks an eyebrow like she's used to people down-playing their pain and health. His cheeks turn pink at getting caught. "My, um, m-my ribs hurt. And, uh, my st-stomach."

Dr. Cho nods as if she expected that. Thinking about it, she probably did. "I'll have to give you some pain-killers. You don't need any more fluids or anything similar since you're now awake," she says. Peter frowns.

"They won't work on me," he says quietly, shy because he's never met this woman before and because he's nervous about her reaction to him. He has a feeling that he'll be seeing quite a bit of her over the next few weeks, however.

Dr. Cho just smiles, "Oh, I know the regular ones won't work! We'll just have to give you some of Captain Rogers' until we can synthesize you some that will work better with your metabolism. You'll have to take them more often, though, since your metabolism is stronger than his!" Peter blinks. This is the first person--other than Ned--who seems excited about his enhancements.

"Oh," he says quietly. "Okay." It takes a few seconds to process what she says, however. "Wait, Captain Rogers'?" The doctor smiles again.

"Yep! He won't be needing them since he's a fugitive," Dr. Cho says, grumbling slightly. It appears that she doesn't agree with what Captain America did during the whole Accords fiasco half a year ago. And honestly, Peter doesn't blame her. He doesn't have the full picture, though he does know that Captain America was the reason the Avengers broke up like a boy band. And Peter heard that Mr. Stark was hurt afterward, there were pictures online of bruises and not to mention Mr. Rhodey's leg braces. Everyone knows that Colonel Rhodes is more or less paralyzed. Without Mr. Stark's help, the man wouldn't be walking anymore. They're actually one of the few things Peter's interested in when he was researching SI.

"Okay!" Dr. Cho says, snapping Peter out of his thoughts. "I'm just going to go ahead and check your ribs and get your vitals." Peter nods and it doesn't take long for the woman to determine that Peter will need bed rest for a week. "I'll go ahead and get those pain killers for you," she says, writing some things on her clipboard. Oh, so she saw the winces. Smiling at Peter, Dr. Cho makes her way out of the curtained-off section.

Peter knows it's rude, but he can't help but listen as the woman talks to Mr. Stark. I mean, they're practically right there! Well, they're not on the other side of the curtain but Peter can hear them!

"Well, he's actually healing really well," Dr. Cho comments, the sounds of shuffling papers accompanying her voice. "It appears that the breaks in his fingers are gone, though there is some bruising that should be gone by the end of the day. The cut on his forehead has completely healed save for the small scar, which I'm sure you saw earlier when you were talking to him."

"What are your thoughts on synthesizing those pain killers?" Peter hears Mr. Stark ask. He sounds worried.

"Well, I don't think it'll take long," Dr. Cho says among more shuffling sounds. "We'll just build

off of Captain Rogers', though we'll have to take some more blood samples. Friday used the small sample we took right after the surgery for those tests I accidentally had her run." Dr. Cho sounds sheepish and what tests? They were running tests on his blood?

"Helen, don't feel bad about the tests. I'm glad you had them run. I wouldn't have ever known that Peter's..." Mr. Stark's voice falters slightly, making Peter fiddle with the blanket in worry as he frowns.

"Your son?" Dr. Cho finishes for him cheerily. Peter freezes and his heart stutters in his chest, no longer audible since Dr. Cho put the machine on silent. With bated breath, Peter waits for Mr. Stark's reply.

The man sighs in what sounds like relief to Peter. "Yeah," Mr. Stark says, sounding somewhat defeated and revealed. "Yeah, I never would have known that he's my kid."

My kid. My kid. My kid. My kid. My kid. My kid. My kid.

The words echo around Peter's mind. He's no longer listening to the conversation, all of his thoughts on the words echoing around his head. Mr. Stark called him his kid. How is Peter Mr. Stark's kid? Did he ask Friday to run the test? Wait, no, Dr. Cho said that she had them accidentally ran. The more the thoughts whirl around Peter's mind the more he feels anxious.

Does Mr. Stark want him? Is that why Peter's staying with him in the penthouse? Because he found out that Peter's related to him by blood? How is he related to him by blood? Wasn't his dad Richard Parker? Wait, was he never related to Uncle Ben? Did he kill Ben, a man that he's not even related to?

Peter doesn't realize that he's hyperventilating until he can no longer breathe. "Peter!" the familiar voice of Mr. Stark doesn't knock him out of his panic. There's a muttered curse that he can't hear over the rush of blood through his ears. "Pete, kid, breathe." Can't you see? He can't breathe. "Breathe!" Peter breathes in a breath sharply at the command.

His hand is on Mr. Stark's chest and the man is taking in exaggerated breaths. It reminds him of what Uncle Ben and Aunt May would do when he had an asthma attack and suddenly it's a little harder to breathe. He flinches back from Mr. Stark and feels momentary guilt at the man's wounded expression

"Peter?" Mr. Stark asks softly as Peter continues to pant. The man keeps his hands visible and by his side. "What's going on inside that head, buddy?"

"I-I--" Peter chokes. "I-I'm y-your kid?" His eyes are watery and he looks into Mr. Stark's eyes. He looks like a deer caught in headlights.

"Shit," the man mutters under his breath. "I forgot about your enhanced hearing." He looks back up to Peter and he takes a seat slowly as Peter watches him. He takes in a deep breath and nods once. "Yeah, um, you're my kid."

Crap.

Chapter 12

Tony taps his fingers on the conference table as he waits for Peter and the detectives to finish speaking. He had tried to convince them to let him sit in on their discussion about all that happened with Dr. Malek, but they had been very insistent that he wasn't allowed to sit in on their conversation, so now he's stewing in an empty conference room, worried out of his mind for his kid.

It's been two days since Peter had found out that he's biologically Tony's son. They hadn't spoken about it yet. And honestly? Tony's terrified of saying the wrong thing to him. The kid is, well, his kid. He doesn't want to be like Howard and completely ignore the kid and hurt him. Tony hasn't touched any alcohol since last year, so that's a relief. He can still be Howard without liquor, though...

"What did you do now?" The voice startles Tony out of his thoughts. He looks up and sags in relief as he spots Rhodey. The man doesn't know that Peter's his kid, yet, and he knows that he should have been the first--or second to Pepper--to know that Tony has a kid. *That* had been quite the conversation. Tony can still hear her voice telling that it'd be okay, that he'd be a good father and wouldn't taint that pure child.

"Nothing," Tony snaps at his friend before sighing. He didn't mean to be snippy with his friend. "Sorry, Rhodey," he tells his friend, noting the surprise the man displays at the apology. "Some things have been happening since Peter..."

Rhodey nods his head and seems to understand what Tony's worried about. "You want to foster him?" he asks, taking a seat near the billionaire. Tony nods and Rhodey sighs. "Have you spoken to his social worker, yet?" Tony nods. That conversation had actually gone over quite well. Pepper had their lawyers draw up all of the paperwork to prove that Tony is Peter's biological father and he had signed to guardianship quickly. Now all he has to do is get Peter to agree to get him to adopt him. Tony's not sure *if* he wants to adopt the kid. He doesn't want to be that tied down the kid. He doesn't want to destroy him.

"I'm his guardian," Tony informs his friend. "For now." The last part's a mutter but Rhodey still manages to catch it.

"For now?" he echoes, raising an eyebrow.

Tony groans slightly, knowing that he'll have to admit the fact that Rhodey's thoughts the other day about Tony having a kid out there *are* actually true. "You know the other day when you made some comment about me figuring out that I had a kid out there and you got all freaked out on me and started blaming me for being irresponsible and I told you that I was completely responsible and sure I didn't have a kid out there?" Tony asks his friend, gaining a suspicious nod. "Well, it turns out that I was wrong."

Rhodey blinks at Tony. "Are you telling me that you *do* have a kid out there?" the man asks with an indignant expression. "Tones, please tell me you're joking." Tony grimaces slightly, telling the man everything he needs to know. "Who is it?"

"It's Peter," Tony sighs, suddenly feeling very tired and very old. Seriously, it looks like he just gained twenty years with that single breath.

"What?" Rhodey asks, blinking at his friend in shock. "Wait, so you just happen to hire a kid as

your personal intern who's in foster care who turns to be your biological kid?" Cue another nod from Tony. "How do these things happen to you?"

Tony groans. "I have *no* idea, honey bear." He rests his head in his hands. "I still need to show the kid where he's staying, *if* he wants to stay. I don't want him going back into the system if this is what happens to him but I don't want to force him to do anything. All I really want to do is get to know my kid. I've missed out on fifteen years of his life, Rhodey. What if he hates me for that?" He hadn't intended on spilling all of his feelings to his friend, but honestly? Tony needs to get his worries out.

"That kid *does not* hate you," Rhodey barks out, startling Tony into looking at him. "I've barely been around the kid but I've seen the way he looks at you, Tones. To him, you've hun the moon." Tony's expression sours slightly.

"He shouldn't look at me like that," he mutters. "I'll only corrupt him. Hey!" The last word was directed towards Rhodey who smacked the side of his head. "What the hell was that for!?" He glares up at his friend who glares back.

"Stop talking about yourself like that!" Rhodey practically glares at him. "That kid already loves you, he's probably been idolizing you since he was a kid, Tony. You said you want to get to know him? Well, let him. Don't do any of that self-deprecating shit that we all know that you do. You're his *dad*, Tones. He needs you." Tony slumps against his chair again.

"I know," he murmurs, knowing that he's about to reveal something personal to his friend. "I'm just afraid of ending up like Howard. We both know what that's like." Rhodey's face turns into a scowl. He's met Howard Stark during and after his time in college. To him, that man is an abusive righteous asshole. Tony was always the same after visiting his father. Quiet, snarky, defensive. It's easy to see why his friend doesn't want to be anything like his father, but he's not.

"You won't," Rhodey says, not entertaining the thought. "You're not that type of person and you haven't touched a drink in nearly year. You will never purposely hurt that kid, Tony. You may not have experience with children, though I know that you've always wanted to have them. Now you have the chance. You have a son, Tony. A *son*. A kid who literally looks up to you and is able to keep up with you in the lab. It's a surprise that we didn't realize that he's your kid. He actually kinda looks like you."

Tony perks an eyebrow. "How does that kid look like me? He's pure, I'm not." At Rhodey's glare, he rolls his eyes.

"Well, for one, you're both short," his friend retorts, making Tony scowl. "You both have curly brown hair and brown eyes, you both are geniuses, he actually looks like a cuter younger version of you," cue the glare, "and you're both self-sacrificing. There's a reason that the kid decided to become a Spider-kid, Tones. He's just like you."

Tony rolls his eyes. Rhodey had been the first person that he had told about Peter. He felt kinda guilty for spouting the kid's secret, but Tony needed advice on what to do. Besides, it's not like he can bench the kid. He literally took down a minor villain so his weapons wouldn't end up on the streets again.

There's a knock on the door before it swings open slightly, revealing a messy mop of brown curls and doe eyes hidden behind a pair of glasses. They're actually Tony's new prototype glasses, EDITH, that he's made in case of an emergency. He disabled all of the more questionable protocols, of course, so all they do is adjust to the wearer's glasses prescription.

"Mr. Rhodey!" Peter says with a grin before his eyes move over to Tony. "Hi, Mr. Stark," he says shyly. "The officers want to talk to you." Tony feels his worries melt away as he looks at his kid but they creep up on him at what he says. Why do the officers want to speak with him? They've already gotten his point-of-view on what happened.

"They say why?" Tony asks as he stands from his seat. Peter shakes head as he tugs on the end of his hoodie sleeves nervously, eyes creeping over to Rhodey before he returns them to Tony. "You want to stay here and talk to Rhodey, bud?" Peter's eyes widen slightly.

"Really?" he asks, voice become higher in pitch in excitement. Red crawls into his cheeks in embarrassment as he looks to Rhodey, asking, "Can I Mr. Rhodey?" Rhodey smiles warmly at Peter, eyes shining in amusement and fondness for the child he barely knows.

"Of course, kid," he says. "You can always talk to me since I'm practically your uncle now." Peter's smile falters slightly before he forces it back up. Tony's heart breaks slightly. The kid misses his aunt and uncle, of course, he does. "I'll see you in a few, Tones," Rhodey directs towards Tony as the kid shuffles into a seat a few feet away from Rhodey. Tony can see the interest shining in his eyes as he looks at Rhodey's hydraulic powered leg braces.

"See you later," Tony tells Rhodey before smiling softly at his kid. "I'll be right back, okay, bud?" Peter nods and Tony hesitantly takes his leave.

Tony makes his way into the adjoining conference room where the two detectives are. "Ah, Mr. Stark," the man of the two says. Tony nods to him and takes a seat.

"What's this all about?" he questions. "I thought I already gave you my statement."

The woman nods as she takes over for her partner. "Yes, but that's not exactly what we want to speak with you about. Peter told us that you two had spoken beforehand on a tablet you had given him?" Tony nods. "Well, we'll just need that conversation and a recording of the argument you heard over the tablet." Tony relaxes slightly and nods.

"Of course, whatever will help Peter and keep his foster father in prison," he says. "I'll have Friday send you the files. Is that all you need?"

The two look at one another almost nervously. "Peter also happened to tell us that you are his guardian." Tony tilts his head to the side.

"And?" he asks, frowning slightly. "I don't see how my relationship with the kid affects the fact that the foster system did a poor job of placing him in a good home and keeping him happy." The two look chagrined and take the hint to back off. Tony stands and levels the two with a slightly stern look. "I'll have my lawyers contact you about NDAs. I don't want it leaked that I've got a kid under my roof, for both his sake and mine." The two detectives nod and gather up their items.

"We'll be in touch," the man informs Tony. He nods and watches as the two leave.

"Fri, you got all that, right?" he asks.

"Of course, boss," she tells him. "I have sent a recording of the meeting to your StarkPad and have contacted Ms. Potts about the lawyers."

Tony smiles. "Thanks, Fri, you're a star," he tells her.

He makes his way to the conference room that Rhodey and Peter are in, simply watching them. The kid's practically bouncing in excitement and Tony's surprised at the changes he's seeing in the

kid. He's noticed that Peter's not as quiet and is more bubbly and is rambling more in nervousness. Tony knows where he got those traits from. He acts like that whenever he's explaining a new technology that he's excited about.

This kid really is his son. And he'd never do anything to hurt him.

fin

Chapter 13

This is just a temporary note that I'll remove in a few days, but I just wanted to let anyone reading this know that I've finished rewriting the second chapter and I've replaced the original one! More rewritten chapters will be coming and I intend to fix the first chapter since I only halfway edited it.

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!